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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1964 Vol. 15, No. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

DEATH IN CELL FIVE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Death and violence are pretty much the same everywhere. But Shayne discovered that in Texas a quick-on-the-trigger aura of the past could be dispelled by an ingeniously plotted slaying.

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Death In Cell Five

by BRETT HALLIDAY

There were things about Texas that could make Shayne think of the cowtown trails of a century ago. But murder amidst stark prison shadows certainly wasn't one of them.

MIKE SHAYNE could see that, as cities go, Jackson City, Texas, was a small city. Shayne could also see that it was a real city, bustling, with an imposing City Hall, a modern Courthouse, and a spanking-new City Jail on a hill just above the river. That much Shayne saw at a glance as he drove down the wide main street that still had the aura of a cowtown, and parked in front of the Courthouse. He already knew that Jackson City was the center of a rich county.

"Oil," Chief Will Gentry had explained. "The entire county out there is rich, and booming, and wide open."

"So crooks, gamblers, and con men from far and wide moved in."

"That's about the size of it," Gentry had agreed. "I happened to know one of the big oil men, so when they needed a man to organize a real Police Department they came to me."

"And you recommended Boyd McLeod?"

© 1964, by Brett Halliday

"I did," Gentry said. "Boyd had fifteen years here with me. He was a good cop. He'd worked hard to make Lieutenant, and a Captaincy wasn't about to open up."

Shayne nodded. In the afternoon gloom of Gentry's office he remembered Boyd McLeod. A restless man. Hard, tough, and relentless on the trail of a criminal, and very ambitious. A job as Chief of Police anywhere would have appealed to McLeod, and a rich city growing big by leaps would have been just what he wanted.

"He took the job just six months ago," Chief Gentry said.

"You think someone worked fast to get him?" Shayne said.

Will Gentry chewed silently on the stump of his black cigar. The Miami police Chief's brooding face was obviously worried. His heavy brows were knit in conflict as his hands toyed with the report he had just shown Shayne.

"Boyd was a hard cop, Mike, you might say too hard," Gentry said, "and too ambitious. But he always played it honest as far as I ever knew. He could push real hard, close to the line, but never real brutality in his Department, or beating up a man that badly himself, no matter how anxious for a conviction he might be."

"Does he have much of a temper?" Shayne asked.

Gentry shrugged. "He has one, and I don't know what pressures he was under out in Jackson City."

"All right," Shayne had said. "He needs help, and you want me to help?"

"I recommended him, Mike, and he asked me to have a talk with you."

"Why would he ask for a private detective?"

Gentry looked grim. "Like I said, Mike, he's been out there only six months. If it's a frame, maybe he can't trust anyone. Maybe he wants the best help he can get. It's not surprising he thought of you. You know each other well."

"Maybe he's guilty and thinks he can buy a whitewash because my close friendship with you will make it look as if I was prepared to take his innocence for granted."

"You don't have to go out."

"You know I'll go," the redhead said.

"Thanks, Mike," Gentry said, a look of relief coming into his eyes.

In his office Shayne had left his affairs in the capable hands of his brown-eyed secretary Lucy Hamilton. He decided to take a jet to Dallas, and hire a car to drive the rest of the way to Jackson City. He wanted to arrive in his own time and unannounced. If it was a frame-up of some kind, then he did not want to alert McLeod's enemies by arriving with a fanfare. If McLeod was guilty, it was just as important to guard against the likelihood of a carefully prepared welcome.

His flight to Dallas was unevent-

ful, and he drove out of the city toward the north and west in his rented car. It was a hot July day, and as he drove Shayne went over the case in his mind. It was depressingly simple. A prisoner had died in a cell of the Jackson City jail. The man had been beaten to death. The citizens of Jackson City had howled "Police brutality," and Boyd McLeod was under suspension. In the *Jackson City News,* that Shayne had bought in Dallas, it was headlined: MORE ON THE DEATH IN CELL FIVE!

That was all that Shayne knew as he drove into the city alone on the sunny July day. He left his car and walked through the heat into the City Jail next to the Courthouse. He had no trouble finding Chief McLeod. The suspended man was in his office.

Boyd McLeod looked at Shayne for a long minute. "No warning, eh, Shayne?" he said at last.

"That was the idea," Shayne said.

"Fair enough," Boyd McLeod said. "I wouldn't have sent for you if I had anything to hide."

"It's been done before, McLeod," the Miami detective said. "Why don't you fill me in. Police brutality is a hard charge."

"Murder is harder," Boyd McLeod said.

Shayne narrowed his grey eyes as he watched the Jackson City Chief of Police. He began to tug on his left earlobe.

"Murder?" Shayne said.

"Murder or manslaughter," McLeod said grimly, "they've got witnesses."

For an instant there was a strained look in McLeod's eyes.

II

IN THE HOT office of the jail, Mike Shayne watched the suspended Chief of Police. McLeod was a tall, angular man with a long, saturnine face. There was a firmness, a suggestion of strength in the harsh set of his features. Or perhaps it was cruelty. It was hard to tell. McLeod's hands were large, and heavy. They looked powerful enough to beat a man to death.

"Ever since I got here," McLeod said slowly, "I've been after the big gamblers, the political fixers. I've put away a lot of small fry, and run out most of the riffraff. But I haven't even worried

the big men. About a month ago I started to worry the big ones."

"Who are they?" Shayne said. "The big men!"

"I don't know for sure," McLeod admitted. "But I'm ninety-nine percent convinced it's one of three guys running the show: Walter Porsche, Morehouse Cowles, or Jed Mims. All three of them showed up in town less than three years ago. All are legit businessmen, but they smell bad to me."

"But no proof?" Shayne said.

"Not even clear suspicion," McLeod said. "But a hell of a clear hunch about one, or all of them."

McLeod fixed his hard eyes on Shayne. They were blue eyes, pale blue, and as hard and intense as tempered steel.

"I hate them, Shayne, the big men who hide behind legit fronts and let small-time punks do the dirty work and take the risks while they bleed a city white! I hate their guts, and I can smell them!"

There was no mistaking the hatred in Boyd McLeod's voice. A hard cop, Gentry had said—maybe too hard. Shayne looked again at the hamlike hands of the Jackson City Chief of Police.

"What are their legit fronts," Shayne asked, "and do they fit their fronts? If they're really big-time hoods, maybe they always use the same legit fronts and we can send to Washington for a lead from the past."

McLeod shook his head. "I already tried that, no dice. Porsche runs an oil-well equipment business, Cowles owns a big print shop, and Jed Mims runs the newspaper. They all seem to know their business all the way. Mims and his newspaper are out for my scalp. Mims is the one who started howling about brutality."

"Any newspaper would," Shayne said drily, "it sells papers."

"I know," Boyd McLeod admitted.

"You said you started to worry them about a month ago?"

McLeod nodded. "Carson walked into my office, said he was afraid for his life, and he was ready to blow the whistle on the whole gambling, bribery, protection, the plain old-fashioned hijacking set-up in the city. He said he could do it because he'd been bookkeeper for the whole organization."

"Carson?" Shayne said.

"Fred Carson," McLeod said. "The dead man."

In the silence of the office Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe and stared at McLeod with his steely grey eyes.

"The dead man was your star witness against the organization?"

"My only witness," McLeod said.

"Why would you beat your own witness to death" Shayne said.

"Mims has it all figured out," McLeod said. "He charges that Carson was a reluctant witness, or

maybe no witness at all, and I was trying to force him to lie to frame Cowles. Mims has his newspaper saying I was so desperate to look good I was out to frame Cowles."

"Why Cowles?"

"Fred Carson worked for Cowles," McLeod said. "Carson was Cowles' bookkeeper at the printing plant."

"Did Carson actually name Cowles?"

"No. He said he wouldn't name the boss until he was on the stand. He told me he was afraid that if he gave me the kind of information I needed to make the charge stick I wouldn't protect him because I'd no longer need him."

"That made you pretty mad, McLeod?" Shayne said.

"It made me mad, all right," McLeod said. "But not mad enough to beat it out of Carson, Shayne."

"Somebody beat him to death," Shayne said. Could it have been one of your men getting eager?"

"Maybe, but I don't think so," McLeod said.

"Who then?"

"I don't know, Shayne. Maybe some hoods hired by Mims or one of the others. That would be logical. Or maybe a personal enemy. Carson had some. My men did a little checking since it happened, and Carson had a sweetheart. Carson also had a wife and a brother-in-law. As near as Lieutenant Maxson can find out, they both hated Carson."

"But he died in your jail."

McLeod tightened his lips. "He died in my jail."

"All right, just what were the circumstances of Fred Carson's death?" Shayne asked.

Boyd McLeod leaned back in his chair, his cold blue eyes still fixed on Shayne. For an instant the tall, angular Police Chief seemed to hesitate in the silent office. Then, abruptly, he shrugged.

"Carson was found on his bunk, dead, when the jail guard called him at nine o'clock that morning. He'd been beaten. There was a guard in the corridor all night, but he heard nothing."

"When was Carson last seen alive?"

"At ten o'clock the night before."

"By who?"

"By me, Shayne."

Shayne stared at the suspended Chief of Police with a puzzled expression on his face. "By you?" he asked.

"That's right," McLeod said. "You might as well hear it all. I went down to try once more to get a statement. I worked him over some. He yelled bloody murder. Two guards heard him. The County Attorney has their statements."

"You worked him over, he was heard yelling, and the next time he was seen he was dead?" Shayne said.

"Open and shut against me, isn't it?" McLeod said. "Only Carson was alive when I left him, Shayne."

"Can't the guard who let you out of the cell, and locked Carson in, prove that?" Shayne said.

"No, he can't," McLeod said grimly. "When I left Carson he was lying face down on his bunk. Carson didn't say a word to the guard, and the guard didn't go close to him. There was no reason why he should. When they found Carson in the morning he was still in the same position on the bunk."

McLeod's eyes showed, again, the sudden fear. "He was lying there just the way I left him. The guard in the corridor hadn't gone near the cell. He hadn't unlocked it, *and no one else went near the cell at night*. The guard never left his post, and from where he was stationed he could see the cell door without turning his head. It was in clear view all of the time."

Shayne tugged harder on his earlobe. "So only you and the corridor guard were near the cell. If you didn't kill Carson, it has to be the guard."

"I thought of that, but it's no good," McLeod said. "You see, the guard in the cell corridor doesn't have the cell keys. We keep the keys outside the corridor in a Guard Room, and we lock the cell guard in the corridor. That way a prisoner can't trick the keys out of the guard, and if a prisoner does get out of his cell he still can't get out of the corridor.

"There were two guards in the Guard Room all that night. They swear that Jones—that's the cell guard who found Carson—never left his post in the corridor. They swear the cell keys never left the Guard Room. So if my guards killed him, *three* of them had to be in on it. Those are big odds, Shayne. Three guards!"

Shayne looked at Boyd McLeod. *"Carson died inside a locked jail cell,"* he said. "Three witnesses swear no one went near that cell after you did. They heard Carson yelling when you were with him. No one saw him alive after you left him. No one went into, or came out of, that cell after you, until the guard Jones found him dead in the morning. Unless *three* guards are

lying, that's the way it reads?"

"That's the way it reads, Shayne," McLeod said.

"No one could have killed Carson except you," Shayne said.

"No one," McLeod said. "Only someone did."

III

MIKE SHAYNE sat in the silent office. Then the redhead stood up and walked to the single window that looked out over the river that ran just beneath the hill where the jail was. A thin stream of garbage and waste floated on the surface of the slow-moving river.

"You must have hit him harder than you thought," Shayne said with his back to McLeod.

"I didn't," McLeod said. "I barely slapped him a few times. I've hit punks ten times as hard without a yell out of them. Carson was a coward, he yelled bloody murder if I just threatened."

Shayne did not turn around. "So you say someone else beat a coward to death in a locked cell and no one heard a sound?"

"It doesn't figure, does it?" McLeod said.

"Then the killer got *out* of a locked cell without anyone seeing him," Shayne said. "Unless three guards are lying."

"I don't think they're lying," McLeod said.

Shayne turned then. His grey eyes were grim as death.

"They'd better be lying," Shayne said, "or I'm going home, and you're going to jail for a long time. Where do I find the guards?"

McLeod looked at his guard roster. "Jones is off duty, I can give you his home address. DeSica and Gomez are on duty in the Guard Room again."

"Write down the address of Porsche, Cowles, and Mims, too."

McLeod wrote. He handed Shayne the list. "You can work with Lieutenant Maxson. He's a friend, I think."

"He better be," Shayne said. "You need a friend."

Outside the office, Mike Shayne lighted a cigarette in the dim corridor. He swore softly to himself. If ever a man looked guilty, it was McLeod. However, Shayne felt there was something just too pat about the case against Boyd McLeod. Shayne dropped his cigarette into a sand pail and walked to the guards Room.

The guards DeSica and Gomez had nothing to add to what McLeod had not already told Shayne. The redhead saw the cell and corridor keys hanging in plain sight on a hook in the center of the wall far from any door. At the left of the guard room a single barred door led into the cell corridor where Carson had died in his cell.

"Like we told Chief McLeod," DeSica said, "We was here all night. We didn't hear nothing. Jones never left the corridor, he

never came out for any keys. No one went in or out. Jones found him dead in the morning."

"Who else was in a cell in that corridor?" Shayne said.

"No one," Gomez said. "Chief McLeod wanted Carson all alone."

That was logical. McLeod would want to protect his star witness. Very logical—and another strike against McLeod. It could easily be made to look as if McLeod wanted no witnesses when he beat up Carson. It was so logical, almost anyone else could have *guessed* that Fred Carson would be alone in the cell block.

"How about the rest of the jail?" Shayne asked.

"Pretty empty, except for the Tank customers," Gomez said. "We had a full Tank, drifters and drunks mostly. The Tank is down that corridor." He pointed to another locked cell door that led off the Guard Room.

"Can I see the cell he died in"? Shayne said.

"Sure," DeSica said.

Shayne noted where the cell guard had been sitting in the corridor. The spot was just inside the door to the guard Room. When Shayne stationed himself at that point he could see the doors of all the cells, but he could not see inside them. He frowned, filing that fact away in his mind as of possible future importance.

"Has the cell been touched?" he asked.

"Not even breathed on." Gomez said. "The County Attorney said hands off. We didn't even clean up the blood."

"Blood?"

"Carson was beat pretty bad," DeSica said.

In the cell Shayne surveyed everything carefully. It was a standard cell. Two bunks against a solid concrete wall. Only one bunk was set-up, the lower one. It was in full view of the barred and open-cage-type door, but the light in the cell was dim, and the bunk was in shadow. It would be easy to mistake a dead man for a sleeping man.

Shayne bent to study the blood stains on the floor. There was not a lot of blood, but there was more on the blanket that covered the bunk. All the rest of the cell was bare. Just three solid concrete walls and the barred fourth wall like a cage. There was nothing on the floor of the cell but the blood and some small pieces of cement from the walls.

Shayne left the cell and walked back into the guard Room. It was looking worse and worse for McLeod. But Shayne had not yet talked to any of the possible killers McLeod had mentioned. He decided to talk to Jed Mims first. A newspaper man should know something—if he wasn't guilty himself.

Shayne walked out of the jail and down the steps in the sun toward his car. He had just reached

the bottom step when something, a sixth-sense, or a faint flash of sunlight from behind him and to his left, made him turn suddenly. The quick turn saved him.

A shot rang out, and Shayne felt a sharp, burning blow on the side of his head. He swayed, his head swam from the blow, and he fell. The second shot missed him. Before he blacked out he heard a strange voice that he realized was his own voice trying to tell him something deep inside his head. The voice was telling him where the shot had come from.

The shot, his own voice said, had come from a window of the County Jail itself!

IV

MIKE SHAYNE opened his eyes. He began to squint against the sun when he realized that there was no sun. Above him there was a dim grey ceiling. He was lying on something soft, soft and cold against his neck—like leather.

"You okay, Shayne?"

The soft and cold sensation against his neck was leather. He was lying on a couch in some office. A short, slender man was looking down at him. Shayne touched his own head. His fingers encountered the bulge of a gauze dressing, securely taped to his skull. Under the bandage his head seemed three times its normal size. He had a bad headache.

"That was close," the slender man said.

"It came from the jail," Shayne said. "Someone in the jail fired at me twice. One shot went wild. Who are you?"

"Maxson," the man said. "Lieutenant Arnold Maxson. I didn't shoot at you."

"Who did? McLeod?"

"He brought you out here," Maxson said.

"Maybe he decided he made a mistake. Maybe he figured if I got killed after he brought me out it would look like someone else wanted me out of the way."

"That's possible," Maxson said. "Maybe McLeod *did* make a mistake. You think he's guilty?"

"I go on evidence," Shayne said. "And someone shot at me from the jail. McLeod knows I don't have any other suspect."

"Okay," Maxson said. "But I think the Chief is in one beautiful frame-up. Why would he kill his only witness?"

"You tell me," Shayne said.

"He wouldn't," Maxson said. "You feel up to talking to someone?"

Shayne sat up. He sat up slowly, but even the slow movement made his head swim, his stomach turn over. He held onto the couch until he felt better. He nodded.

"You have someone?"

"Yes," Maxson said.

The Lieutenant flipped his intercom and snapped an order. Al-

most at once the outer door of the office opened and a uniformed policeman came in. He had a very pretty young girl with him.

"Okay, just leave her," Maxson said, and to the girl: "Sit down Miss Garcia."

The girl could not have been a day over twenty, Shayne told himself. A small, shy, pretty girl with long dark hair and pale olive skin. She sat demurely with her knees pressed close together.

"Shayne, this is Miss Rafaela Garcia," Maxson said, "She was Fred Carson's girl."

The girl's eyes filmed as if she were about to cry.

"She kill him, I know!" Miss Garcia said. "She kill my Fred. She and her brother. They do it together."

Shayne watched the girl. "Who killed Carson?" he said.

"She! The wife! She hate him, because she know he is in love with me. She and that brother—a bad man."

"Rafaela's referring to Joe Ellis," Maxson explained. "He was Carson's brother-in-law. He's been in trouble a lot, mostly gambling."

"Gambling?" Shayne said.

Maxson nodded. "Yes, we wondered about a tie-in, but so far we can't find much. We think Joe Ellis may be in with the organization, but we don't have any proof. One thing's sure, though, Ellis didn't like Fred Carson. Carson seemed to have something on Ellis."

"Enough for murder?" Shayne said.

"Maybe. There was a killing in a card game about a year ago. We think Ellis did it, and we think Carson knew it."

"What about his wife?" Shayne said.

"Marie Carson? Not young anymore, and Carson was playing around with Rafaela here," Maxson said.

Rafaela Garcia was really crying now. "She kill him! She know he love me! When he get all the money we were going away. To Mexico, he told me."

"Money?" Shayne said.

"Much money! Very big money he tell me. Then we go to Mexico and we are married. She kill him! I kill her!"

"Where was he getting this money?"

"I no know, but he don' lie to me," the girl said, and she buried her pretty face in her small hands and cried.

Maxson looked eager. "Maybe someone was going to pay Carson to clam up! That would be logical. So—"

"So after paying Carson to clam up the same people killed him?" Shayne said drily. "That doesn't make sense, now does it?"

"Hell," Maxson swore. The Lieutenant did not seem happy.

"In fact, it's another strike against McLeod if Carson was paid to clam up. That would give Mc-

Leod even more reason to beat up Carson."

"Maybe the pay-off was for something else," Maxson said.

"Tell me what?" Shayne said.

"I don't know, damn it!" Maxson swore. "Unless—wait a minute! Maybe the Chief offered Carson a pay-off to talk! Yes, that would be logical, too. We needed a witness real bad. If McLeod paid him he wouldn't kill him."

"Did McLeod mention a pay-off to Carson?" Shayne said.

"No, but he wouldn't." Maxson said. "If McLeod did offer money, and the girl here's telling the truth, maybe Ellis or Marie Carson found out about the run-out Carson planned and so they killed him."

"It could be," Shayne said. "I think I'll go and talk to them after I see Jed Mims."

"I'll talk to them first, Shayne," Maxson said.

Mike Shayne stood up painfully. The room swayed again for a long minute. Then it steadied down and Shayne felt better. He looked at Maxson.

"Go ahead and talk to the wife and Ellis," Shayne said, "Only we've still got the real problem, Maxson."

"What the hell is that?" the Lieutenant snapped.

"How was Carson killed *inside a locked cell,*" Shayne said. "How did Mrs. Carson, or Ellis, or anyone except McLeod kill a man alone in a locked jail cell."

Lieutenant Maxson was still swearing grimly as Shayne left the jail building for the second time.

V

THE OFFICE OF the *Jackson City News* was a two-story building on the edge of the downtown section of the fast-growing city. As Shayne descended from his car at the curb he looked up and down the street. To the left he saw another two-story building. He stopped on the sidewalk to look at it. It was topped by a large sign that read: COWLES FINE PRINTING.

Shayne tugged slowly on his earlobe. He should not, he knew, have been too surprised. After all, a printing company and a newspaper logically belonged together, but was it a mere coincidence that the dead Carson's employer, and the major attacker of McLeod, should be business neighbors?

Perhap there was more to Jed Mims' attacks on McLeod than outraged public spirit.

Whatever Mims' motives were, Shayne could entertain no hope of gaining any information concerning them this time. The newspaper publisher was out. The blonde receptionist looked at the redhead's bandaged head with a faint air of distaste.

"I expect him back in a few hours," she said. "Did you have an appointment?"

Shayne shook his head. "Just tell Mims it's about Chief McLeod," he told her. "He'll see me."

"McLeod won't be Chief very long," the blonde said with indignation.

Shayne did not stay to bandy words with the blonde, although she was good enough to look at to bandy more than words. He merely flashed her his most enigmatic smile, and left.

He did not return to his car, but walked to the nearby building that housed the offices of Morehouse Cowles. At the printing company the receptionist was a redhead, and Cowles was definitely in. Cowles was happy to talk to Shayne.

"Mike Shayne himself?" Cowles said, holding out a hand about the size of a small tennis racquet. "I've read about you for years, Shayne. What brings you to Jackson City?"

"Boyd McLeod," Shayne said bluntly.

"Of course, McLeod came from the Miami Police didn't he? I should have pegged it. You don't think he killed Frederick Carson?"

"Do you?" Shayne said.

"What else can I think?" Cowles said blandly. "He's a hard man, and he got some bug in his head about me being a boss criminal or some such nonsense. At first I laughed it off, but when he picked up my bookkeeper and tried to use him against me, I had to agree with Jed Mims that McLeod is a dangerous man."

"You and Mims are good friends?"

"The best," Cowles said, "but I've told Jed to not let that influence his writing about McLeod."

"That was generous of you," Shayne said drily.

"I thought so," Cowles said.

The big man smiled. Cowles was not as tall as Shayne, but he was almost as wide as he was high. Big and solid with the look of a man who could give a good account of himself in a brawl. From the long scar on Cowles's brow, Shayne decided that Cowles had engaged in more than one brawl.

"You and Mims came here about the same time?" Shayne said.

Cowles nodded. "We bought these business within a few months of each other," he said. "It's a

booming town, we've done pretty well."

"Where did you come from?"

"Me? New York. Had a plant up there for a couple of years. I moved around. Owned a plant in Detroit before that. You can check on me, Shayne?"

"I expect I could," Shayne said. "No doubt you can prove just where you were your whole life."

"Just about," Cowles said. "Clean record all the way."

"How about the night of Carson's death?"

Cowles laughed. "An alibi? No, I don't have one—at least not a good one. I was here in the office until late, but I doubt if anyone saw me. Then I went home to bed. I live alone. Not much of an alibi, but, then, I don't need one."

"You're lucky," the Miami detective said.

"No, Shayne, just innocent of anything," Cowles said.

All the time he had been in the office with Cowles, Shayne had been studying the office. There was nothing unusual. It had all the earmarks of what it was supposed to be—the office of a successful businessman. There were many telephones, but not too many, not enough for a gambling boss. Nothing at all was in the room that didn't belong there.

"Maybe you are at that," Shayne said.

"I can't say I like Boyd McLeod after what he's said about me," Cowles said. "But if I can help, I will."

"Help him in or out of jail?" Shayne said drily.

A flat, narrow glint came into the eyes of Moorehouse Cowles. The big man was not smiling.

"You know, Shayne, I'm getting tired of these damned insinuations about me," Cowles said. "McLeod killed a man trying to frame me, and now you come along with your wise-guy dialogue. How much do you think I'll take?"

"I figure as much as you can get your hands on," Shayne said bluntly.

Cowles purpled. "Get the hell out of here!"

Shayne left Cowles still radiating a fine shade of purple. He walked out of the building and back to his car. With Mims out, Porsche the oil-well man looked like the next stop. In his car Shayne lighted a cigarette. He sat there in the heat and smoked and did not feel optimistic. He had little hope of finding out any more from Porsche than he had from Cowles.

Wherever he turned the stone walls seemed to be getting higher.

Whoever was behind the organized crime in the city was very clever. It would have taken a miracle for anyone except Boyd McLeod to have killed Carson, and Shayne did not believe in miracles. Somewhere there had to be an explanation. Unless, of course, Boyd McLeod was really guilty.

VI

"MCLEOD'S AN animal," Walter Porsche said. "I've seen his type before, and they're all the same. They think a cop's uniform gives them the right to push anyone around. Well, McLeod pushed too hard once too often, that's all."

Porsche reminded Shayne of a small terrier. The oil-well equipment man was small, and dark, and scrappy. There was dirt under his fingernails, and his hands were rough and creased from work, as if Porsche knew how to use his own equipment, and was proud of his ability to do so.

"So you think McLeod's guilty, too?" Shayne said.

"Him or his men. It amounts to the same thing. The boss sets the conduct of his department, and if his men beat Carson it's still McLeod's fault," Porsche said emphatically.

"You know McLeod suspects you of running the big crime in this city?" Shayne said.

"I don't give a damn what Boyd McLeod thinks!" the terrierlike man snapped. "I run my business, and I mind my own business. If anyone wants to charge me with anything, let 'em prove it. Now I'm a busy man, Shayne. If you've got nothing more to say let me get back to work."

"You came to Jackson City a few years ago?"

"Yes."

"And set up this business?"

"That's right."

"Where were you before that?"

"Tulsa."

"In the same business?" Shayne said.

"I was a drill-foreman, okay? I saved my money, borrowed, and bought this business. Anything else?"

"You can prove where you got your money?"

"Yes, but I don't intend to. Okay?"

"Where were you the night Fred Carson was killed?"

"Driving to Tulsa, and I can't prove it," Porsche said.

"I hope you don't have to try."

"I won't," Porsche said. "You're chasing a wild goose, Shayne. Boyd McLeod is guilty. He's just using you for a smoke screen."

"Maybe," Shayne said.

"You can bet on it," Porsche said.

"You seem very sure."

"I am, Shayne," Porsche said. "Very sure."

"You think it's a simple case of police brutality? Not murder by McLeod or anyone?"

"That's the way I see it," Porsche said.

When he returned to his car, Mike Shayne was not at all sure that he did not agree with Porsche. A simple case of too much desire to convict someone. Was McLeod just using him to set up a smoke screen? It was more than possible.

Jed Mims, the publisher, thought it was certain.

Mims was in his office when Shayne returned to the newspaper. Mims was absolutely sure Shayne was a mere diversion, but Mims did not think it was a matter of simple over-eager brutality.

"I think it was murder, Shayne. McLeod was out to frame Cowles through Carson. He killed Carson to cover up."

The publisher was a tall man, and almost a dead ringer for Boyd McLeod himself—at least at a distance. He sat behind his desk toying with a letter opener.

"So you're out to get McLeod?"

"I don't like police brutality," Mims said. "I'm a newspaper man, and I've got my job to do."

"You've always been a newspaper man?"

"Yes," Mims said. "I know all about you Michael Shayne. You're a very famous man, only this time you're making a serious mistake. McLeod's just trying to use you to cover up."

"It's funny," Shayne said, "but that's what everyone thinks, especially Cowles and Porsche. You're so sure McLeod was wrong about them as well as yourself?"

"I don't know about Porsche, but Cowles is clean as snow. I work pretty close with Morehouse, and I like him. I didn't like McLeod trying to use Fred Carson to frame Cowles."

Shayne fixed his steel grey eyes on the tall publisher. He was looking thoughtful as he began to tug on his earlobe.

"You know, Mims, everyone thinks I'm a smoke-screen, and everyone thinks McLeod was out to frame Cowles. But something puzzles me. McLeod didn't pick up Carson. Carson just walked in and volunteered. Carson was the one who said he could name the crime boss, not McLeod."

"Unless McLeod is lying," Mims said.

"I don't recall anyone suggesting that McLeod lied about Carson, not even your newspaper," Shayne said.

"What does that prove?" Mims snapped.

"You didn't get against McLeod until *after* Carson was dead," Shayne went on. "Your paper even printed a lot about McLeod having a witness against the organization. If Carson really volunteered, wasn't it Carson who was out to frame someone, if he wasn't telling the truth?"

Mims smiled. "Not necessarily, Shayne. McLeod could have just made it look that way. In fact,

that's just what I think he did. McLeod talked Carson into making it look like he was volunteering to blow the whistle."

"Then why would McLeod kill his own witness!" Shayne said sharply. "It doesn't make sense. You say McLeod set up a frame and then killed his whole set-up? It's crazy."

Mims' smile became wolfish now. The tall publisher leaned forward in his chair eagerly.

"Not at all, Shayne," Mims said softly. "You see, Carson reneged! Carson changed his mind the day before he was killed. He told McLeod he wasn't going to go through with it. He probably told McLeod he was going to expose the whole frame-up. McLeod had to kill him! That's why it's murder. *Carson was not going to go on that witness stand!*"

For a long minute nothing seemed to move in the newspaper office. Mike Shayne just sat. Mims still leaned forward and smiled his wolfish smile. Shayne felt cold. It looked bad for Boyd McLeod.

"How do you know that, Mims?" Shayne said at last.

"Joe Ellis, Carson's brother-in-law, told me. Carson told Ellis the night before he died. Carson was pulling out!"

VII

JOE ELLIS SAID, "That's the truth. Fred told me he wasn't going through with it. I figure McLeod was sore as hell."

The brother-in-law of the murdered Fred Carson was a scrawny little man already bald. Ellis had small, mean eyes that shifted constantly and never looked straight at Shayne. The woman, Marie Carson, watched Shayne and her brother in the dismal living room of the dead Carson's house.

Shayne had driven straight to Carson's house through the late evening sun that was already turning to twilight. Now he sat in the cheap living room and faced the widow of Fred Carson and Joe Ellis.

"You think McLeod killed Carson?" Shayne said.

"What else, peeper?" Ellis sneered.

Shayne turned to the widow. Marie Carson was a stocky woman who had, perhaps, once been pretty. She was not pretty now, and Shayne remembered the beauty of young Rafaela Garcia.

"What do you think, Mrs. Carson?" Shayne said.

"I don't think anything," Marie Carson said.

"Not even about Rafaela Garcia?"

Marie Carson turned red. "That little tramp! At least she won't have Fred now, damn her rotten soul!"

"You hated her?"

"I hated her. The cheap little witch!"

"Enough to kill your husband?"

The woman turned her eyes to Shayne. She was about to answer when Joe Ellis broke in.

"Listen, peeper, Lieutenant Maxson was all over that, you hear? Marie's clean. She got an alibi for all night. Sure, she hated the Garcia dame, who wouldn't. But she didn't kill Fred."

"What about you? Where were you that night?" Shayne said.

Ellis grinned. "I was playin' poker with six friends, and I can prove it. Maxson got all the names."

"I'll bet they're all fine upstanding citizens," shayne said.

"They're witnesses," Ellis said. "If you want a killer, besides McLeod, try the Garcia broad herself. I mean, she was counting on that big pay-off, and maybe Fred don't get the payoff if he clams up, see?"

"You knew about a big payoff?"

"Sure I did. McLeod was paying Fred to talk. And I'll swear to it in court," Ellis said. "Maybe you can prove the Garcia tramp was going to get jilted and killed Fred for spite."

"You know McLeod was paying off Carson?"

"Sure I know."

"How?"

"Fred told me himself," Ellis said.

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe. He watched the scrawny

brother-in-law. Carson was dead, so at a trial it would be Ellis's word against McLeod's word. With the other evidence, it would look very bad for McLeod.

"All right, Ellis, only I'd advise you to sit tight. Maxson's going to want to talk to you a lot more."

"Anytime, peeper," Ellis said, and the scrawny man grinned.

It was dark in Jackson City by the time Mike Shayne left the Carson house and returned to his car. In the car he lighted a cigarette and sat back behind the wheel to think. No matter how he turned the case in his mind it always came out the same—strike three for Boyd McLeod. If it was a

frame-up, it was a masterpiece.

Rafaela Garcia would swear Carson was getting a big pay-off. Joe Ellis would swear the pay-off was from McLeod, and that Carson was going to welsh on his agreement. Three of McLeod's own police guards would swear that no one but McLeod went in or out of the cell. They would swear they had heard Carson screaming as he was beaten. An open and shut case against McLeod, iron-clad from whatever angle you looked.

All that Shayne had to combat the case against McLeod were McLeod's own statements, plus the fact that Shayne had been shot at —and that could have been done by McLeod. Boyd McLeod could be lying all the way. Every piece of evidence pointed to the probability that Boyd McLeod was lying in his teeth.

But if McLeod were telling the truth, then there were some very puzzling aspects of the whole case. McLeod said Carson had volunteered to be a witness. Why should he have volunteered and then changed his mind? If Carson *had* changed his mind. Only Joe Ellis claimed that he had, and McLeod had told Shayne that Ellis and Carson hated each other. It wasn't logical that Carson would tell Ellis something so important. It was just as illogical that Carson would tell Ellis about a payoff from McLeod.

Shane smoked and ran his big hand through his thick red hair. No, if McLeod were telling the truth, then it would not be logical for Carson to tell Ellis about anything, especially about a pay-off from McLeod. Yet Rafaela Garcia said there had been a big pay-off, and Carson *would* have told her.

If Carson had not told Ellis about it how had he come to know about it and from whom had he acquired his information? Maybe from someone else who had made the pay-off, or had promised a pay-off, to Carson. Which brought Shayne right back to strike three on McLeod. Someone else had made a pay-off to Carson to change his mind and clam up. So McLeod had beaten Carson up in anger and killed him.

Except that McLeod insisted that Carson had not changed his mind. Carson was going to testify, according to McLeod. If McLeod was telling the truth, then Shayne had to believe that someone had paid Carson money for some reason other than refusing to talk, and had then killed him after paying him!

It made no sense at all. Boyd McLeod had to be lying, and had to be guilty. Mike Shayne swore softly to himself and threw the glowing stub of his cigarette out the car window. As he did so, he froze.

In the shadows near the Carson house something, or someone, had moved.

Motionless, Shayne watched the shadows. He saw the movement again. Someone was in the shadows and sneaking closer to Shayne's car. It was dark, and whoever was there wanted to be closer.

In the car Shayne tensed every muscle. Slowly his left hand went down to the door handle and gently opened the door half an inch. His hand on the door handle, his muscles tensed and ready, Shayne waited.

The moving figure in the shadows came closer.

The figure in the shadows raised something.

Mike Shayne waited.

The figure seemed to rise up.

Shayne lunged through his opened door just as the shot rang out.

Shayne hit the street, rolled, and came up behind his car. The figure in the shadows came into the light of a streetlamp already running away. Shayne pulled his pistol from his shoulder holster and raced after him.

The man ahead ran down the street, suddenly heard Shayne behind him, turned once in panic, and ran on. The man continued on down the street, and turned off into a cross street where shadows clustered thickly. Shayne turned after him, his gun ready. Ahead he saw the man standing and looking straight at him.

The cross street was a dead end on a cliff above the river. The man looked wildly left and right for escape, but there were high walls on either side, walls that fenced in two large houses.

Shayne grinned and walked towards the man, his gun aimed.

The man dropped his gun and raised his hands. There was fear in his eyes in the light of the streetlamp at the end of the dead-end street.

Shayne stepped toward the man. He was ten feet away when the two shots exploded in the night from the top of the wall to the left. Shayne dove for the ground, rolled again, and came up shooting at the top of the wall.

There was nothing on the wall to shoot at now. Whoever had fired the shots had jumped down and gone.

Shayne turned, his temples pounding. The man who he had been chasing lay on his back in the middle of the street. He had been shot twice in the head. He was very dead. Shayne bent over the body and began to swear.

The two shots had not been meant for him. Someone had not wanted Shayne to talk to the man he had chased. Shayne left the body and walked back to his car to find a telephone.

VIII

THE BODY WAS in the morgue, and Mike Shayne sat with Lieu-

tenant Maxson in Maxson's office in the jail. Shayne was tugging hard on his earlobe.

"It was Jones," Maxson said, "the guard who was watching Fred Carson's cell. Why would anyone want to kill Jones?"

"Why would Jones want to kill me?" Shayne said. "It had to be Jones who shot at me from the jail. Then he tried to shoot me out at Carson's house. Why?"

"He was mixed up in Carson's death somehow," Maxson said. "It has to be that."

"But he didn't have the keys," Shayne pointed out. "He couldn't have opened the cell or gotten inside to beat up Carson."

"And if he didn't beat up Carson, why should he resort to violence for no understandable reason?" Maxson said. "Why would he want to kill you?"

"He was afraid of something," Shayne said slowly. "He or whoever hired him, was afraid of something I might find out. You know, I'm beginning to believe McLeod is innocent."

"Thanks for that," Maxson said.

Shayne stood up and began to pace the silent office. "They're afraid I'll find something, or guess something," he said. "Maxson, why would someone need to have Jones, the guard *outside* Carson's cell, on their side?"

"Maybe to smuggle something or *someone* out!" Maxson said. "What about that? Jones discovered the body, and maybe helped the killer to escape!"

Shayne shook his head impatiently. "How? There were the two guards in the Guard Room, and they saw no one leave the cell corridor. And as for hearing anything, the way Carson would have yelled when he was being beaten the guards in the guard room would have heard that too."

"Maybe not," Maxson said. "Maybe Carson wasn't the yelling type and—"

"McLeod says Carson yelled bloody murder when he was just being threatened," Shayne said.

"Maybe Jones was paid to smuggle someone in?" Maxson said. "But there are just as many reasons why that is difficult to believe!"

Shayne was not listening. He had stopped his pacing and stood now looking out the window at the river in the night. A thin stream of garbage was floating from the shore to where the current was slightly flecked with foam.

"Maxson," he said, turning suddenly. "I want to look at that cell again. You know, I wondered all along about Carson volunteering to be a witness."

"What has that got to do—"

Mike Shayne interrupted. "I'm not sure yet. Let's look at that cell," he said.

Shayne led Maxson down the corridor to the Guard Room.

through the Guard Room into the cell corridor and into the cell. Inside the cell Shayne stopped and began to study the walls. Suddenly he bent down. A small drainage grating was set in the wall. The grating was set solidly in the center of a large concrete block.

Shayne bent close to study the grating and the block of the wall. He touched the floor near the grating. When he looked at his hand there was cement dust and small pieces of cement on his hand. He took a knife from his pocket and chipped at the cement that held the block with the grate in it. He compared the pieces of cement from the wall and from the floor.

"Look, Maxson, they're different," he said. "The small pieces on the floor are older. This cement in the wall is new!"

Maxson looked at the cement fragments. "They're new all right. But who? Jones?"

"I'd say so," Shayne said grimly. "What's behind this drain grating?"

"A drain pipe, it goes to the main sewer," Maxson said. "The main sewer runs pretty close to the jail. The town grew so fast we still use the old sewer. It goes to the river."

Shayne nodded. "I saw the garbage on the river. How big is the pipe behind this wall?"

"I don't know," Maxson said. "What about the main sewer?"

"A big conduit," Maxson said. "Maybe ten feet diameter. You can see it where it comes out into the river. It's never more than half full of water.

"Can you get a man from the Sewer Department down here?" Shayne asked. "I'd like to have a look at the other side of this wall!"

IX

THE MAN FROM the Sewer Department, Frank Maltby, held his flashlight in one hand and his map in the other. He led Shayne and Maxson along the wide walk-way above the foul-smelling water of the sewer.

"The prison has one mian drain," Maltby was explaining, "it comes out into the main sewer about forty feet back from the river, right about here."

Shayne and Maxson stood on the walkway and looked at the

large opening. It was not as big as the main sewer, but was at least two and a half feet wide. Suddenly, Shayne bent down. There was a wide stain on the concrete of the walk-way.

"Blood," Shayne said. "Maxson, how big was Carson?"

"Small," Maxson said. "Real skinny!"

The sewer man, Maltby, shook his head as he looked at his map.

"A man could come through this main drain, Lieutenant," Maltby said, "but the drains from the cells into the main drain are only six inches wide. A man could never get out of a cell through a six inch pipe."

"Let's take a look," Shayne said. "That pipe's too small for me."

"I think I can make it," Maxson said. "How far in is the pipe from Cell Five?"

Maltby looked at his map. "The tenth pipe in."

Maxson bent down and began to crawl up the wide main drain. For some time Shayne could see the feet of the Lieutenant in the light of the flashlight. Then even Maxson's feet vanished.

Shayne and Maltby waited. Shayne lighted a cigarette. He smoked in the silence of the giant sewer. The only sound was the lap-lap-lap of the water that flowed sluggishly through the sewer toward the river.

Time seemed to stand still as Shayne waited. But at last he heard the sound of Maxson backing down the main drain. The Lieutenant's feet came out first. Maxson was covered with grime—and cement fragments.

"There isn't any tenth pipe," Maxson said. "It's been dug out. There's at least a three foot hole that goes right up to the cell wall. The cement block's been cemented in just recently. That's how he got into the cell to kill Carson."

Shayne shook his head. "No, Carson wasn't killed in the cell. The men in the Guard Room would have heard the noise. Carson was killed down here. This blood proves it. He was killed and taken back. His body was returned to the cell, and the killer came back the sewer."

"What the devil was Carson doing down here?" Maxson said. "I mean, the hole was dug from the outside into the cell."

Shayne nodded slowly. "I'm not sure, but I think I've got a pretty good hunch. It's the guard Jones. I think he was bribed to smuggle tools into Carson. Carson thought he was escaping. He dug out the concrete block with the tools Jones gave him. Someone else had already dug the hole from the drain pipe to the cell.

"Carson just pulled out the block, went out through the opening into the hole, and pulled the block into place behind him. He crawled down through the main

drain to the sewer. The killer was waiting for Carson and killed him. The killer had to be someone Carson knew."

"Then how was the block cemented back in the cell on the inside?" Maxson asked.

"Jones did that after he discovered the body," Shayne said. "Jones probably expected to find the cell empty, but the killer had brought Carson's body back, and Jones was in a real bind. He had to go along with it. He got the cement and patched the stone up later. After all, no one really looked at the cell at the time. Why would they?"

"All right," Maxson said, "but why would Carson want to escape? I mean, he volunteered to be a witness? What did he gain by escaping?"

"Yes," Shayne said, "that volunteering to talk bothered me all along. But I think I know. I think he was paid to volunteer! It was all a whole diabolical plot to frame McLeod. Remember how McLeod said Carson yelled when he was hardly hit? The whole thing was a set-up. Only Carson didn't know he was being set-up to be killed! I don't know just what Carson thought he was doing, but—"

The sudden splash echoed loudly through the darkness of the sewer. For an instant Shayne, Maxson, and the sewer man froze. There was total silence as the echo died away. Then there was the sound of feet running away from close by as if someone had been listening!

Maxson swore and grabbed the flashlight from Maltby. The long beam probed the darkness and illuminated the running figure of a small man.

"Stop!" Maxson shouted.

The man ran on. He was nearing the entrance to the sewer. Maxson raised his pistol.

"No, Maxson, we want—" Shavne shouted.

The shots split the darkness and reverberated up and down the length of the giant sewer pipe. In the beam of the flashlight the running man sprawled and fell with a scream into the water of the sewer.

Shayne and Maxson ran to where the body floated face down in the water. Shayne reached down and turned the body face up. It was Joe Ellis. He was dead, shot once through the heart from the back.

"Damn it, Maxson, he might have talked!"

"Sorry, I shot automatically," Maxson said. "I only meant to wing him, but the light was bad."

"Thin and scrawny," Shayne said. "I guess weve found our killer, Maxson."

"And we can prove how he got into, and out of, the cell." Maxson said. "I guess this clears McLeod and ends it."

"It clears Boyd McLeod," Shayne said grimly, "but it doesn't

end it. Ellis didn't plan this. Ellis was just the tool that did the killing —a fall-guy just like Carson."

Maxson swore softly. "That's another count against me. He might have led us to the Boss. He would have told us. I know his type. They always talk when they're caught."

Shayne stood in the dark sewer and stared down at the floating body of Joe Ellis.

"Maybe Ellis will tell us who the Boss is anyway," Shayne said. "Like you said, Maxson, punks like Ellis always talk when they're caught. I've got an idea. I want you to tell the radio and TV people we've caught Joe Ellis."

Shayne bent over again and began to pull the floating body of Joe Ellis to the walk-way.

SOME THREE HOURS later that night, anyone looking in through the window of the late Fred Carson's house would have seen three men seated around the dining room table. Two of the men were leaning forward and talking to the third. The third man sat upright in a high-backed arm chair, his face partially hidden in shadow.

The two men leaning forward and talking were Mike Shayne and Lieutenant Fred Maxson. The man in the high-backed chair, sitting straight and rigid, was Joe Ellis. Anyone watching from the window would have seen Shayne lean toward Ellis menacingly.

"All right, Ellis, let's go over it again," Shayne said loudly. "We've found the hole where you dug into the cell, and we've found Carson's blood in the sewer. We found that cold chisel you dropped, and it has your prints on it. We've got you cold, and you know it."

Anyone watching would have seen Lieutenant Maxson stand and tower over the seated Joe Ellis.

And, then, there was someone watching. Silently from the night at the rear of the house, a shadowy figure glided to the window and looked in and saw Lieutenant Maxson lean close over the seated Joe Ellis. Maxson's voice was hard and angry.

"You're cooked, Ellis, and you know it. We know you didn't plan the frame on McLeod. Tell us who planned it! Who paid you and Carson! Tell us and we'll make a deal. We'll let you plead guilty to Murder Second. You'll get off with twenty years. If you don't talk it's the chair, Ellis!"

The figure at the window edged closer. At the table Joe Ellis seemed to move, to cringe, as Lieutenant Maxson leaned down over him and put his hand on Ellis's shoulder.

"Make it easy on yourself, Ellis," Maxson said.

"You know you're going to talk, Ellis," Shayne said. "You won't take the whole rap and let the Boss get off. He got you into this."

"That's better!" Maxson said.

"Let me take this down, I'll write an official statement, we'll protect you—"

Maxson reached for the long pad of paper on the table of Carson's living room. As he did so, Joe Ellis sat for an instant in full view of the window. The lurking figure at the window moved with the speed of a snake.

The man at the window raised a long-barreled revolver and fired three times straight at the half-hidden figure of Joe Ellis in the high-backed chair. Ellis pitched forward out of the chair and sprawled on the living room floor.

The man who had shot turned instantly and ran back the way he had come. He took five long strides from the window. Then he stopped. From the bushes and shadows all around the house the waiting policemen emerged to surround him, their guns drawn and ready.

The man who had shot Joe Ellis hesitated for only a second. Then he raised his pistol and shot himself in the head.

When Shayne and Lieutenant Maxson arrived the man lay on the ground in the dark night. He was still alive. He breathed thickly, laboriously, but he was still alive, and he smiled up at Shayne.

"I should have known it was a trap, eh, Shayne? I underestimated you, and that was a very serious mistake. You're a smart man."

"You feel like telling us about it, Mims?" Shayne said.

Jed Mims did not seem to hear. The tall, angular newspaper publisher closed his eyes where he lay on the ground. The smile was still rigid on his craggy face. He seemed to be talking to himself.

"I had to try anyway," Mims said. "He would have talked. Punks like Ellis always talk when they're caught. I had to try to stop him. I should never had used a man like Ellis, but when you're desperate—"

"You needed a thin man, a small man, to go through that pipe," Shayne said.

"I had to use him," Mims said. "And I had to kill him. Too bad, you would never have caught me without Ellis helping me. I don't like jail much, it's better this way. You can't prove I had Carson killed. But now you could convict me of killing Ellis, so it doesn't matter."

Shayne and Maxson said nothing. They only looked at each other. There was no point in telling Jed Mims, crime Boss, that he had been trapped into killing a man who was already dead.

"You want to tell us about Fred Carson?" Shayne said.

The dying man chuckled. "A good plan, very simple. Carson really was my bookkeeper. But that fool Cowles never knew about that. McLeod was getting too close to me. I paid Carson to volunteer as a witness. McLeod fell for it. McLeod was so anxious to get me

he swallowed Carson's yarn all the way.

"They were all so easy to fool! Carson thought the plan was to just make McLeod look stupid by having his star witness escape, and so did Jones. Such stupid idiots! It was perfect, until you showed up!"

Shayne nodded. "You sent Carson to pretend to be a witness, to yell bloody murder as if being beaten. You had Jones give Carson tools to dig out. You had Ellis dig the hole up from the drain to the cell wall. When Carson reached the sewer, Ellis was waiting to kill him. Then Ellis pushed the body back up the pipe into the cell, and fitted the block back in the wall. Jones found the body and had to go along with you."

Mims nodded and tried to laugh, but blood welled up in the publisher's throat and he choked. Pain stabbed through his twisted smile.

"All fools!" Mims croaked. "A perfect frameup! Then you had to show up. That fool Jones couldn't even kill you. I should have done it myself. I should have killed you!"

"You had both Jones and Ellis watching me," Shayne said. "Jones botched his job twice. and the last time I had him, so Ellis killed him to keep him from talking to me. Then you heard about the capture of Ellis, and you thought vou had to kill Ellis to keep him from talking. A vicious circle, once it started, wasn't it, Mims?"

The dying man sneered. The effort made him cough, and blood welled from the fatal wound in his head. Mims voice was almost gone now, faint but, to the end, hard and evil.

"I should have . . . shot . . . you," Mims whispered. "Yeh, I should have . . . killed you. . . not Ellis!"

Shayne looked down at the dying man. "You didn't kill Ellis," he said. "He was dead, Mims. You shot a dead man, and it trapped you. You were so smart, you outsmarted yourself."

The eyes of the dying man widened. He stared up at Shayne, a look of pure hate coming into his bloodless face. He tried to sit up, his left fist clenched, straining to reach Shayne. Then he gasped once, his eyes filled with fear, and he fell back onto the night ground. Jed Mims was dead.

Maxson bent and picked up the gun. "I guess that does it," he said.

The sun was already high in the sky over Jackson City when Shayne climbed into his car to drive back to Dallas and the jet to Miami.

Boyd McLeod leaned in at the car window. "I owe you a lot, Mike," he said.

"You owe Will Gentry," Shayne said, "he believed in you."

"You solved it," McLeod said. "I never even thought of someone digging into prison."

"Maxson said the word, into,

and if you weren't lying, then someone else killed Carson and the only way in was through the wall," Shayne said.

"Then I'm glad you believed I wasn't lying."

"I almost didn't. You looked awfully guilty. Mims counted on that."

"He didn't count on you," McLeod said. "But I did."

The Chief of Police grinned at Shayne and stepped back as the redhead put his car in gear and drove off and out of Jackson City on his way back to Miami. The last thing he saw was the garbage floating in the river at the mouth of the sewer pipe. It had been a very clever plan. But not quite clever enough.

Shayne sighed and fell silent.

Next Issue's Complete MIKE SHAYNE Novelet

MURDER ON BERKELEY SQUARE

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne finds himself sympathizing with Scotland Yard . . . when a slaying five ways baffling makes a London visit mandatory.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

It was the kind of rigged crime set-up that keeps police officers awake nights. And violence and sudden death could not be ruled out.

by ALSON J. SMITH

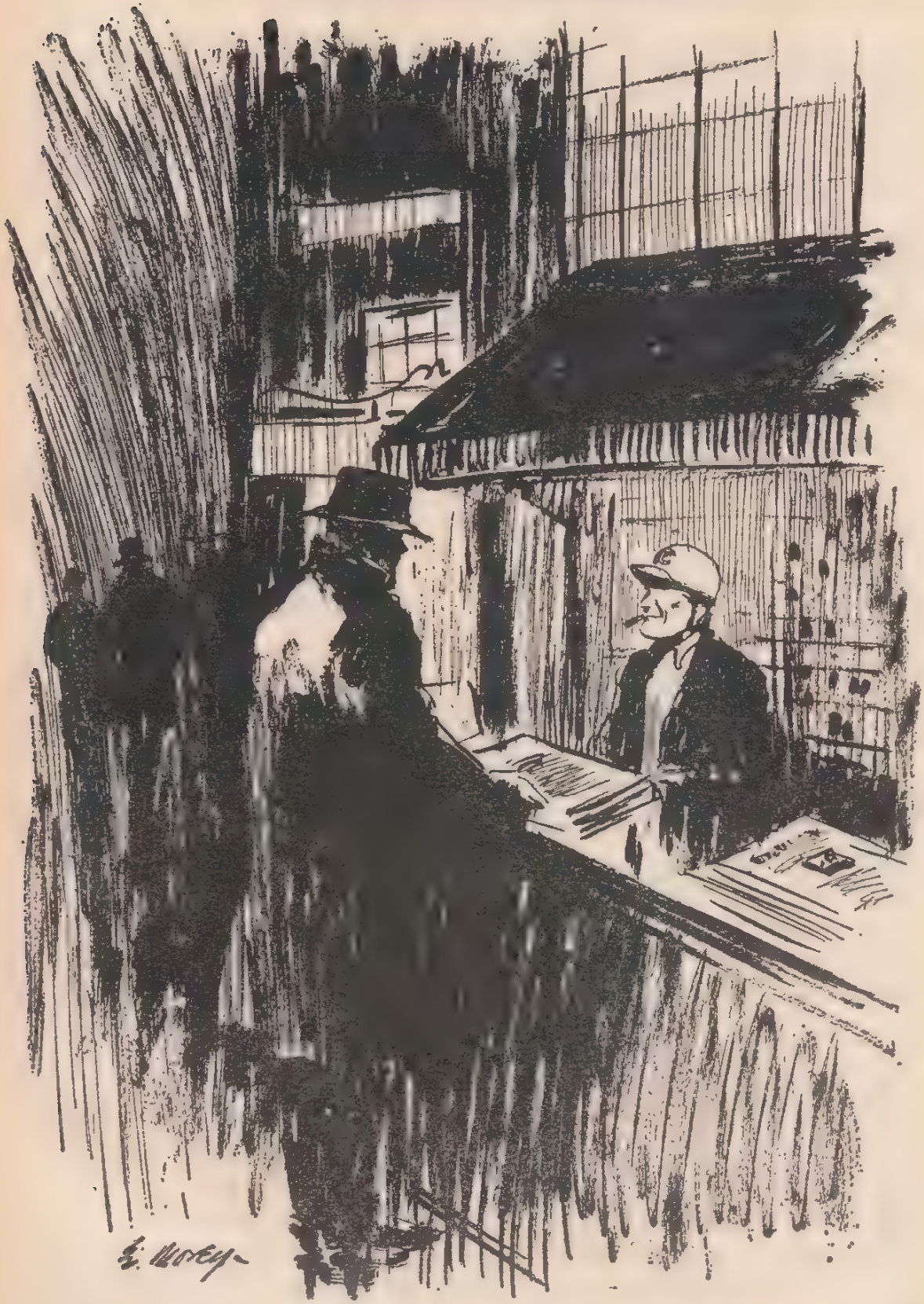
THE TRIM LITTLE blue TR-3 prowled slowly north on Clark Street. It was raining, so the top was up. The hatless driver, wearing a black raincoat, might have been an associate professor of English or a football coach or a customer's man, heading home to Wilmette or Evanston after a day's work. But he wasn't. He was Steve O'Hara, thirty-nine, lieutenant, Criminal Investigation Detail, Chicago Police Department.

O'Hara was a career cop and a graduate of Northwestern university with a Master's in Criminology. He had a square, tanned, smooth-shaven face, light blue eyes, and a shock of black, crew-cut hair graying at the temples. He was a well-built 5-11, and weighed about 175 pounds. He was smart, tough, and a bachelor. In Chicago, you had to be smart and tough to be thirty-nine and still a bachelor.

It was just a routine prowl of the Near North Side—bohemia, Chicago's Left Bank, with old coach houses made over into chintzy studios, expresso coffee parlors, jazz cellars, and a variety of night spots ranging all the way from brassy strip joints to artsy-craftsy saloons featuring folk-singers.

It was also Outfit territory, and had been ever since Johnny Torrio had wrestled it away from Dion O'Bannion, Hymie Weiss, and the Moran mob forty years before.

A Hard-Hitting Policy Racket Novelet



It was the best place in the city to pick up information, and that was Steve O'Hara's job—to pick up information. On this rainy fall night he was just checking with some of his people—'informants', if you want to be polite, 'stoolies' if you aren't particular. A grubby business, but no big-city police department can function without it.

The blue TR-3 turned right at Chicago Avenue and headed slowly towards the old gray stone water tower at Michigan Avenue. It was a dismal, damp night, and the wind off the lake whipped and stung. The streets, for the most part, were deserted.

O'Hara eased the powerful little sports car into a parking space near the water tower, locked it, and fastened the top button of his raincoat. Then, half-turned against the wind, he walked over to the newsstand on the northwest corner of Chicago Avenue and the 'Boul Mich', as Chicagoans liked to call this section of Michigan Avenue.

A wizened little old man was perched on a stool behind the piles of early editions of the next morning's papers. He wore a battered blue baseball cap with a red "C" on it, thus asserting his loyalty to the North Side's beloved Cubs. The wet stump of a cigar was clutched in his yellow teeth. This was Joe 'Bats' Toland, who, fifty years ago, had been the Cubs' batboy.

He'd had the newsstand for thirty years and he knew everybody who was anybody between the Loop and North Avenue. That is to say, he knew every pimp, hustler, madame, fairy, stripper, bartender, crook, policy writer, politician, cop, and hoodlum on the Near North.

Steve O'Hara threw down a quarter. "Hello, Batsy. Morning Trib, huh."

The old man blinked nearsightedly. Then he recognized the police officer and shook his head. "O'Hara for the love o' God go home," he advised. "This ain't a fit night even for flatfeet."

Steve grinned. "Got anything for me, Batso?"

Bats grunted. "Half a dozen new girls checked in at Lulu's today. Lulu told me her own self. She wants the word to get around. Says they're just up from Memphis."

Steve shook his head. "That's Vice Squad stuff, Batsy. But I'll pass it along. Anything for me?"

Bats put the wet cigar stump in a cracked saucer he used as an ash tray. "You mean the Outfit? Nah, not a thing. Go home, O'Hara. You're gettin' your feet wet."

"Just leaving, Batso. Hey, you forgot my change."

The old man looked at him with disgust and handed him a nickel and a dime. He snorted.

Steve sauntered west towards State Street, the morning *Tribune* folded neatly under his arm. The

rain had almost stopped, but the icy-fingered wind still blew in sharply from the lake.

He tried a few other people. Pat Hogan, an ex-con, who was the doorman at the New Orleans Jazz Bar on Ohio Street; old Flora Ridley, who had once managed an all-girl orchestra and was now a masseuse in a Swedish health club on Dearborn; Eddie Pokowski, a former professional football player with the Green Bay Packers now tending bar in a fairy saloon just off Rush. None of them had anything worth even a ten-spot.

He decided to try one more, then call it a night and head for Gail's. Since he was only a few doors away, the last one might as well be Penny Copper, a peeler at the Strip City Club on Rush near Ohio. He liked Penny, a pert Puerto Rican whose straight monicker was Haydee Gonzales, and who supported her mother and four younger brothers and sisters by wiggling out of her clothes four times a night for jaded beer-drinkers and jovial conventioneers.

The Strip City was a Syndicate joint, and was a good place to drop in every now and then. The club was a horseshoe-shaped saloon with a tiny stage at the open end and a runway down the center, so that the *artistes* were working practically in the customers' laps. A three-piece combo accompanied the girls from behind a curtain at the back of the stage. There were booths along the walls and a sprinkling of tables with red and white checked tablecloths.

It was early—10:35 P.M.—and the joint wasn't a quarter filled. Half a dozen of the usual beer-nursers at the bar. Two conventioneers and two B-girls pawing away at each other in a booth. Four sailors from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station at a table. Three B-girls, lounging between the bar and the sailors' table, half-heartedly trying to score.

A blonde who called herself Gay Delight was working, and he knew that Penny would be on next if the fat M.C. was following the customary routine.

Gay Delight—real name Elsie Hammacher—let her last flimsy flutter to the stage, and went off to a smattering of applause and loud wolf-whistles from two sailors at the far end of the bar.

The fat M.C. told a couple of dirty jokes about Polish drunks, and then brought her on: "And now, ladies an' gennelmen, Miss Red, Hot, and Wonderful, the Toast of the Tropics, Penny Copper!"

There she was, sheathed in a red dress studded with sequins, blacked-eyes, black hair falling to her waist, red-lipped, voluptuous, in spike-heeled silver shoes. The combo went to an Afro-Cuban beat and her hips went with it. She slithered down the runway, bump-

ing sinuously to the hot throb of the music.

She recognized him and winked. He winked back.

She finished in nothing but a g-string, her magnificent copper-colored body beaded lightly with perspiration. She had worked strong and she got a bigger hand than the blonde.

Ten minutes later, after a quick shower, she came through the stage door to the right of the bar. She was wearing a modest yellow sweater and skirt, and she had doused herself with a pleasant, inexpensive perfume.

"O'Hahra," she said. "Good to zee you." She nodded towards a booth. "Les go zair. Bartenders, zey got rabbit-ears."

He picked up his beer and went over to the booth with her. After a waitress had brought another beer for him and a rum and coke for her, she took his hand in both of hers and smiled.

"Now wot I do for you, lovair?"

He grinned. "If I told you, you wouldn't do it."

She kissed his hand and squeezed it against her breast. "Hell I wouldn't, O'Hahra. For you I turn on."

He pulled back his hand and drank from the beer bottle. "Some other time, *querida*. Give me a rain check."

"O'Hahra, I geef you anyting. Now, wot you want?"

"The usual. Any rumbles?"

She frowned in concentration. "No, I don' hear nothing. Wait—zey put in seex slots in Spheenx Club, over on Clark."

"When?"

"Thees afternoon, 'bout tree o'clock. I hear boss tell bartender."

"We'll check that. Who's been around?"

She shook her head. "Nobody much, except maybe Eddie Enreechee. You 'member heem?"

So Eddie Enrici was out of Joliet, where he'd been doing three to five for operating a floating crap game. He was a gambler who owned a night club in Calumet City, out in the county. He was one of the soldiers, as the Outfit called its hoods, and he was in line to move up. O'Hara remembered him as forty-ish, squat, muscular, truculent. He was married and had two 'teen-aged sons stashed away in a private school somewhere.

"Eddie Enrici," he said, half to himself. "What's he doing up on the Near North. This isn't his turf."

"I don' know zat, O'Hahra."

"Does he come in often?"

"Two, tree times in las' week."

Interesting, but probably not important. Eddie was too far down in the Mob's pecking order. He yawned. "Anybody else?"

She shook her head. "Jus' like always—johns an' sailors."

He palmed her a ten as he got up to go. Not that the information about the slot machines and Eddie

Enrici rated it, but she was a good kid and she could use the money.

Outside, the wind had died down. He walked slowly back to where he had parked the TR-3. Not a very productive prowl. Hell, he ought to be glad that things were quiet on the Near North. But he wasn't. He was restless and vaguely troubled. He headed for Gail's, just a few blocks away on East Superior Street.

Gail Davenport was his girl, and had been for three years.. She was twenty-six, a pert ash-blonde with gray eyes and an interesting figure. She was an assistant society editor for the Chicago *Interocean,* an evening paper.

He found a parking place about a block away from the big gray stone house that had once been a millionaire meat-packer's mansion but was now cut up into a dozen small but chic apartments. He walked up to the second floor and pushed the bell for 2-D, and there she was, in Capri pants and halter.

"Hawkshaw," she said, closing her eyes and turning her little heart-shaped face up to be kissed. "My favorite fuzz."

He held her close. She felt good. She looked good. Her warm, moist kiss stirred all the right reactions.

She had a fire going in the tiny fireplace, and the makings were on a coffee table in front of it—bourbon, water, ice cubes, glasses. They sat on one of the two love

seats that flanked the table and she mixed the drinks—three fingers for him, two for her.

They sipped the highballs and watched the fire, and finally she said: "So you've been mingling with us beatniks on the Near North tonight. Strike it rich?"

He shook his head. "Not until just now." He kissed her on the neck.

"You should have taken me along. I'm good at getting people to talk, especially men-people."

"Shut up and deal," he whispered, setting his drink on the coffee table and putting his arms around her.

O'Hara left at a little after three, and the streets were empty and gray with wisps of fog scudding along in the breeze off the lake. He got to his own apartment, up on Fullerton near Lincoln Park, by

3:30, and dropped off to sleep with his clothes on, feeling warm and tired and relaxed.

On the whole, not a bad night at all.

THE C.I.D. wasn't located in the City-County Building at Clark and Washington, in the Loop. It was off by itself in what had once been a brick precinct station at Canalport and Halsted, on the edge of a ward called, for sufficient reason, the Bloody Twentieth. Here ham-handed, blunt, tough Captain Bill Pelswick, a cop's cop, headed up a twenty-man outfit whose sole job was to keep on top of underworld activities. Within the Department and the press it was better known as the Anti-Hoodlum Squad.

The morning after his prowl of the Near North Side, Steve O'Hara reported to Captain Pelswick. "Didn't pick up much, Bill," he said apologetically. "Some new girls at Lulu's. Sam Fusco has put some slots in the Sphinx Club. And Eddie Enrici's been seen around."

Captain Pelswick looked up. "I knew Eddie was due out about now. Who made him, and where?"

"Peeler at Strip City. Says he's been in two or three times during the last week."

"He can't have been out very long. And what's he doing on the Near North? Cal City's his turf."

Steven O'Hara shrugged. "He'd have to get Sam Fusco's okay to worked Near North. Damned if I know what he's doing up there—if anything. Maybe I'd better find out."

"Do that, Steve. Put a tail on him for two, three days, then get back to me."

After he returned to his own office, Steve picked up the phone. The old station didn't have a modern intercom system. When you wanted anybody you had to phone or go in person. "Hello Erla," he said to the switchboard girl. "Get me Sergeant Hughson."

Don Hughson was an accomplished tail, harder to shake than a summer cold. "Hi, Don," Steve said, when Hughson's voice came over the line. "Eddie Enrici is out of Joliet and hanging around the Near North. Bill thinks somebody ought to keep an eye on him for two or three days. Pick a partner and stay on his back."

"Enrici, eh? I think Slezak is available. Where do we pick up on Eddie?"

"He's in the Strip City Club on Rush two or three nights a week. Or you can try his own joint on State Street in Cal City. He's got a home and family out there, too. The county boys can cue you on that. And Don—don't call in. His car probably has a radio that picks up our band."

"Got you, Steve. Will do."

After Sergeant Hughson had hung up, Steve buzzed the switchboard again and asked for Registra-

tion and Identification. His instructions this time were brief. "Hello, Chris. Send up the file on Eddie Enrici, will you? That's E-n-r-i-c-i."

A sergeant from R. and I. brought the requested record up within minutes. Steve lit a little cigar and studied it. It read:

Enrici, Edward Joseph, alias Joe Rich, WMA, born Chicago, Illinois, May 27, 1915. 5 ft. 8 inches, 179 pounds. White scar tissue over left eye from cut by broken beer bottle during fight. Arrests: Dec. 19, 1934, suspicion of car theft, case dismissed. Feb. 16, 1937, gambling (policy), convicted, suspended sentence. March 18, 1943, gambling (policy), convicted, served six months in Bridewell. Oct. 28, 1947, gambling (crap game), nol prossed. June 11, 1954, suspicion of perfume counterfeiting, case dismissed. May 23, 1959, suspicion of murder of Frank Santella, of Calumet City, Illinois, nol prossed. July 2, 1960, gambling (crap game), convicted, sentenced three to five years Joliet."

Steve O'Hara threw down the file in disgust. A fat-faced, middle-aged punk. But what was he doing on the Near North?

He had more important things to think about, so he had practically forgotten about Eddie Enrici three days later, when Sergeant Hughson made his written report on the pudgy ex-con. It read as follows:

"We picked him up at his own joint, the Totsy Club in Cal City. He went from the club straight home that night. The next morning while I was getting a little shut-eye, Slezak tailed him to the Pulaski-Cashing Service at Chicago Avenue and Dearborn. He was driving a 1961 Dodge four-door, black, which he parked in the alley alongside the check-cashing office. He got there at 11:30 A.M. and stayed until 2:20 P.M. Came out with two of Sam Fusco's boys, Mike Alteri and Spider Humphrey.

"They drove to the Scotland Sea Fare Restaurant on North Clark and had lunch. Came out at 3:47 P.M. Mike and Spider took a cab. Eddie drove the black Dodge to the Decatur Hotel on East Ohio, and put it in the hotel garage. We checked him out. He has a room there, 814, rented by the month at $140 per.

"He came out of the hotel at 8:25 and walked over to the Milano Restaurant on Rush. Came out at 9:38 and went into the Strip City, two blocks down the street. About an hour later, Mike, Spider, and an unidentified WMA entered the club. They came out with Eddie at 11:40. They all got into a cab, which dropped Eddie off at the Decatur Hotel.

"That was the M.O. for three days. Pulaski Check-Cashing Service from 11:30 A.M. until 2:15 or

2:20 P.M. The Scotland Sea Fare for lunch, with two or three of Sam Fusco's boys. The hotel until around 8:30, then a club or bar. Back to the hotel by midnight. Yesterday afternoon, after lunch, he drove down home, which is a two-story brick house on Torrance Avenue in Cal City. That's where we dropped him."

Steve looked up from the report and nodded. "Nice going, Don. Whatever Eddie's doing on the Near North must be keyed to that check-cashing outfit. Is it legit?"

Hughson frowned. "Seems to be. They cash payroll checks and money orders, accept payment for phone, gas, and electric bills. The usual."

"Anything out of the way about this one?"

"There's a back room that can be entered from the alley. That was where Eddie and the Sam Fusco boys went in."

"Was there a phone back there?"

Hughson nodded. "I checked the wires. There was a lead-in for the back room."

"You couldn't see in?"

"Nope. Two windows, both with venetian blinds pulled shut."

As soon as Hughson had left, Steve O'Hara went in to see Bill Pelswick. He handed him Hughson's report.

The captain read it carefully. Then he said: "It's probably a big nothing, but I'd like to know what the hell they're up to in that back room. Find out who owns the place. And"—he hesitated—"we'll put a tap on the phone. I'll get the court order and you brief Walt Brubaker. Let's get cracking on this."

SERGEANT WALTER Brubaker was an electronics expert who had once worked for the telephone company. He operated the radio room in the basement of the old precinct station. Steve told him what they wanted and described the layout. Brubaker nodded happily.

A state supreme court order authorizing a wiretap on the telephone in the rear room of the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service, 47 West Chicago Avenue, was handed down the following day. That afternoon, around five o'clock, Detective Sergeant Walter Brubaker, dressed in the gray coveralls of an Illinois Bell Telephone Company repairman, alighted from a phone company maintenance truck, murmured something about a routine check of equipment to the two clerks in the check-cashing office, expertly took apart and put together the phone in the office, and then went into the empty back room and put a tap on the phone there.

In the basement radio room of the old precinct station at Canalport and Halsted, Sergeant Brubaker monitored the tap. Nothing came through until 12:15 P.M. the next day. As soon as the line began crackling, the sergeant called Steve O'Hara, who hurried down to the radio room.

A call was being placed somewhere in the city to the phone in the back room of the check-cashing service. Steve O'Hara and Sergeant Brubaker listened intently to what appeared to be gibberish:

Out: "This is Ab. Thanks for the seventy-eight bucks."

In: "Hi, Ab. That's right, isn't it? Seventy-eight?"

Out: "Seventy-eight dollars even."

In: "Thanks for calling, Ab."

There was no more activity on the tap until exactly 1:45, when another call came in:

Out: "I think I can make it by four."

In: "Swell. See you at four."

At 2 P.M. a call went out on the tapped line to a St. Louis number:

In: "Hello, Bill?"

Out: "This is Bill."

In: "You have a date for four."

Out: "Four, right. I'll make it."

The final conversation over the tapped wire came at 2:15:

In: "Thanks for the seventy-eight bucks, but you still owe me four."

Out: "I get you. Seventy-eight plus four."

At five that afternoon, Steve O'Hara, Sergeant Brubaker, Sergeant Hughson, and Sergeant Iezak huddled with Captain Pelswick in the captain's office, to see what, if anything, they could make out of what had been heard on the wire-tap.

"All those numbers," mused Steve. "Must be a code."

Brubaker nodded. "A two-digit number—seventy-eight—and then a third digit—four. The four repeated twice. Then a final three-digit figure—seven eighty-four."

Captain Pelswick growled in his throaty old cop's voice: "This is your baby, Steve. What's your guess?"

O'Hara paused to light a little cigar. "Sounds like policy to me.

That's Eddie's specialty. I think we ought to get Jerry Monohan in on this."

Lieutenant Jerry Monohan was the C.I.D.'s numbers racket expert, having formerly been a member of the Vice Squad's Policy Detail.

"You've got him, beginning tomorrow. I want an eight A.M.—five P.M. stake-out put on that check-cashing service. And a day and night tail for Eddie Enrici!"

"Right, Bill," said Steve. It looked like Eddie Enrici and whatever hanky-panky was going on in the back room of the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service was going to tie up practically all of the C.I.D. for an uncertain number of days.

The next day Lieutenant Jerry Monohan joined Steve O'Hara and Sergeant Brubaker in monitoring the tapped phone. What they heard was practically a repeat of the previous day. At exactly 12:15 P.M. the first call came in to the back room of the check-cashing service:

Out: "Irv. I am leaving early. Today's my grandmother's birthday. She's eighty-five."

In: "Thanks, Irv. Give her a kiss for me."

At 1:45, another call came in:

Out: "Joe can't come to the party. Fell down an open manhole and broke his leg in three places."

In: "Lucky it wasn't his head."

At 2 P.M. someone in the back room put in a long-distance call to St. Louis.

In: "Hello, Bill?"

Out: "Bill speaking."

In: "That recipe we were talking about calls for three cups of sugar."

Out: "Three it is."

Fifteen minutes later came the final call of the day:

In: "The man said he'd make delivery by three. Eighty-five pounds."

Out: "Got you. I'll look for eighty-five pounds of the stuff at three."

When Steve O'Hara, Lieutenant Monohan, and Walt Brubaker huddled with Captain Pelswick at 5 P.M., Steve said: "Well, Jerry, what did you make of it?"

Lieutenant Monohan, forty, a red-haired, red-faced Irishman, set fire to a cigarette and blew a smoke-ring towards the ceiling. "I'd say it had to be a policy code. All policy play is based on three numbers or sets of numbers—the wheels, treasury balance, the pari-mutuel totals, even the Chinese lotteries.

"You have the last number—the third digit—repeated twice here, but that's because it's being transmitted. It comes in, and then is phoned out. The first two digits seem to be coming from one source, and the third from another in St. Louis."

Captain Pelswick rumbled: "Let's check with the phone com-

pany, find out where these calls are coming from and going to!"

O'Hara shook his head. "Not yet. Eventually, we'll have to. But let's play it cool for awhile. I say we don't check outside and don't use the police radio—except in an emergency—until we tape this a little better."

Jerry Monohan agreed. "I think we have more than just a new policy game here. I think we've got a rigged racket."

Captain Pelswick got up and began pacing the floor. "How so, Jerry? What makes you think it's rigged?"

"That third digit coming in separate from the other two and late," Monohan said. "They could be post-passing the chumps who play with them. It all depends on when they hold their daily drawing. If it's after, say, two-thirty P.M., they could be rigging that third digit."

"Spell it out, Jerry," grunted Captain Pelswick.

"Say the biggest play for any given day is three twenty-nine. The first two digits come in from the treasury balance, the pari-mutuels, or whatever they're using. There are thirty-two of them. Now, if the third digit is a nine, they are hit heavy. So they rig the source of that third digit so that it isn't a nine. Maybe three twenty-four has a light play, or no play at all, so they fix that third digit so it's a four. Don't ask me how. I'd have to know what figures they were using to tell you that."

Captain Pelswick sighed. "All right, Steve. Where do we go from here?"

"We sit tight and do our homework. We keep the tail on Eddie Enrici, the stake-out of the check-cashing service, and the tap on the phone. We write down those numbers every day and we study them. We compare them with the treasury balance, pari-mutuel totals, stock volume, and all other figures that are published daily, and we try to locate the source, or sources, of their number. Then we find out if the number is being fixed. If it is, that makes it a conspiracy to defraud, and we throw the book and see who it hits."

STEVE O'HARA met Gail Davenport at a Loop restaurant that night and they ate together. She had to cover some society wingding in a downtown hotel, so they couldn't go anywhere. He told her about the Eddie Enrici case, knowing that she respected his confidence and wouldn't talk about it.

"But darling," she said, "isn't it dangerous? A man like Eddie Enrici, and with Sam Fusco and the Outfit backing him up—they play for keeps, don't they?"

"It's not as dangerous as gray-eyed girls with apartments on East Superior Street who also play for keeps. Say, remind me to have a tap put on your phone, will you?"

"Don't you want to have the bedroom bugged? That might be more interesting."

"Thanks. A great idea. The boys at the station will love it."

"Oh, you!" Gail looked at her watch. "Got to run. Take care, sweetie."

It was six days before the pieces began to fit together. Six days of monitoring the tapped phone, carefully reading newspapers for published figures, tailing Eddie Enrici, and maintaining an 8 A.M.—5 P.M. vigil at the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service. Six days of monotonous, hard-nosed, routine police work.

The first break came when the detective assigned by Steve O'Hara to find out who owned the check-cashing service came up with the information that the business was operated by a man named Victor Gaspar, who leased the premises at 47 West Chicago Avenue from the Venice Realty Corporation, 72 East Huron Street.

The president of the Venice Realty Corporation was one S. J. Fascoff, who, upon closer examination, turned out to be none other than Sam Fusco. Mr. Gaspar, by an odd coincidence, was the brother-in-law of Mr. Fascoff-Fusco.

This meant that they were up against the Outfit's North Side boss, who was in all probability the real owner of the check-cashing service. It also meant that there was a considerable amount of danger involved, because Sam Fusco took a very dim view of anybody who took too close a look at any of his various business interests.

The day after Sam Fusco's connection with whatever was going on in the back room of the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service had been established, Lieutenant Jerry Monohan came in to see O'Hara. He threw a paper down on the battered desk.

"Here it is, Stevie-boy. We're two-thirds of the way home."

O'Hara looked doubtfully at the paper. "This looks like the work sheet for the income tax return, long form. Does it mean something?"

"Does it mean something? M'boy, it means that Jeremiah Aloysius Monohan has ferreted out the source of the first two digits of our daily number!"

"Great, Jerry. Let's have it."

"Well, it wasn't easy. We did nothing but read newspapers for a week. But it's definite. The first two digits—the ones phoned in by 'Ab' and 'Irv'—are taken from the daily noon bond sales figure which appears in the late editions of the afternoon papers, the ones that hit the street about three P.M."

"Give me a for-instance."

Monohan took the paper. "For instance, yesterday the final number on our phone tap—the winning number for yesterday's drawing—was eighty-nine. The noon bond sale figure for yesterday was

—" He quoted a figure, $1,580,-779. "The second and third digits of the bond sale total are the first two digits of the daily winning number."

"No possible error, Jerry?"

"No possible error, Steve-o. We checked for every day since we put in the wire-tap. Let's go down to the radio room and get today's number."

It was a few minutes before noon. They went down to the basement radio room and listened to the tap with Sergeant Brubaker. At 12:15, as regular as Old Faithful, the line crackled and a call came in to the phone in the back room of the always busy check-cashing service.

Out: "Ab, here. It may be cool up there, but it's ninety-two in the shade down here."

In: "Ninety-two, huh? Better get out of the shade."

At 3 P.M., Steve went out to the nearest newsstand on Halsted Street and bought the late edition of the *Interocean*. Back in his office, he laid the paper out on his desk and Jerry Monohan expertly flipped it to the financial page where the figure for that day's noon bond sales were printed.

Bond sales to noon had amounted to $1,926,544.

AT THE DAILY 5 P.M. huddle in Captain Pelswick's office, there was an air of subdued excitement.

Captain Pelswick almost shouted: "Okay, Steve, tell us where we are!"

O'Hara lit a little cigar. Then he said: "We've connected Sam Fusco with a new form of policy that Eddie Enrici seems to be handling for him. It's not Chicago Wheel, not treasury balance, not pari-mutuels. The first two digits of the winning number come from the second and third digits of the daily bond sales to noon. The third digit is phoned down to St. Louis every day at two P.M. That leads us to think that this is rigged policy, with the third digit being manipulated so as to make a big hit impossible."

Captain Pelswick frowned. "That makes sense. That's the way Eddie Enrici operates. But they're getting the bond sale figure before the late papers come out. Where—and who—are they getting them from?"

O'Hara laid his cigar in an ash tray. "That we don't know yet.

The source of the third digit we don't know. *We* don't know who plays this kind of policy, or who writes it, or where the drops and banks are. But—you should pardon the expression—you can make book that all these questions will be answered by this time next week."

Captain Pelswick smiled. "You've got the confidence of a pickpocket at a county fair, Steve. Well, I hope it's justified. What do we do now?"

"Jerry and his team take the St. Louis papers apart to find that third digit. We hold the tail on Eddie and the stake-out at 47 West Chicago Avenue. We try to get a line on who plays this kind of policy, who writes it, and where its drops are. And of course we maintain the phone tap."

They broke up, and Steve O'Hara drove the TR-3 up to Gail's, where he was to have supper. He sipped a dry martini and watched television as she prepared the meal in the tiny kitchenette. Later, over coffee in front of the fireplace, they talked about the case.

She said: "I can't make a word of sense out of it. You say the first two digits of this daily number come from the noon bond sales. But how does this Enrici person get the figure for the noon bond sales so quickly?"

"Probably from the newspaper —like yours."

"But our late editions, the ones carrying the bond sale figures, don't hit the street until around three."

"No, but the figures are released shortly after noon. When we're ready, we'll find out from the phone company where they're being called in from."

Her gray eyes had that speculative look that he had learned to distrust. She said: "When do the papers get the figures?"

"On their teletypes, about ten minutes past twelve."

"Then it could be someone on one of the papers who is phoning them in to the check-cashing service at twelve fifteen every day."

He sweetened his coffee with a slug of brandy. "Could be. Or somebody at the stock exchange. Or a hundred other people down on LaSalle Street."

Gail had that faraway look in her eyes. "There are only three afternoon papers. It could be somebody on the *Interocean,*" she said.

"Two somebodies. Ab and Irv, whoever they are. They take turns."

Her eyes sparkled with excitement now. She stood up. "Do you deputize me to track them down? If they are working for a newspaper, I can do it. I have friends on all the papers in town."

Steve looked at her and grinned. "Consider yourself deputized, Constable Davenport. Report to

me tomorrow night at eleven, highball in hand."

The next break in the case came two days later when Jerry Monohan came in to O'Hara's office smiling like a cat who had just dined on fine roast canary. He threw a paper down on the desk.

"Monohan rides again," he caroled. "Here's your third digit, fresh up from Saint Loo."

O'Hara looked at the paper. Monohan's neat rows of figures showed that the third digit of the winning number coincided with the final digit of the St. Louis clearing house figure as it appeared daily in the late-afternoon edition of the St. Louis evening paper, which appeared on the streets about five-thirty. The clearing house itself closed at four-thirty. On the previous day, the winning number had been 431. The clearing house total had been $2,204,031.

IN THE MEETING that afternoon in Captain Pelswick's office, Steve summed it up: "The first two digits of the winning number are the second and third digits of the noon bond sales as published here in Chicago. The third digit is the final digit of the daily St. Louis clearing house total. Take it from there, Jerry."

Jerry Monohan grinned. This was the kind of statistical puzzle he enjoyed. "We now know that the third digit of the daily winning number is the final digit of the St. Louis clearing house total for that day. But here's the switcher—that third digit isn't coming *from* St. Louis. It's being phoned from here down *to* St. Louis. Our wire-tap tells us that. Then it turns up as the final digit in the St. Louis clearing house total."

Sergeant Brubaker said softly: "And that means that the St. Louis clearing house figures are being rigged."

O'Hara said: "Exactly. And that can be done only by someone at or near the top of the staff at the St, Louis clearing house. He is getting a call from here telling him, in code, what number those boys in the back room of the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service want to have for their third digit."

"The reason for that," Jerry Monohan cut in, "is because like I said before, they can avoid being hit hard. Say seven eighty-nine gets a big play. Well—it just can't win because they'll manipulate the St. Louis clearing house total to make it seven eighty-two, which has little or no play. That third digit—the swinger—is worth millions to Sam Fusco and company, and yet it means a shift of only a few bucks in the clearing house total. It all dovetails perfectly."

Captain Pelswick said in his gravelly voice: "Next move, Steve? We're getting close!"

"We're inside their twenty-yard line and driving, and this is where

the going gets tougher. This is obviously a pretty big deal, and they may fight to hang on to it."

Jerry Monohan smiled. "All right, coach. You warned us. Just give us the next play."

"We've got to find out from the telephone company about incoming and outgoing calls from the back room of the check-cashing service. We've got to locate some of the new policy drops. And we've got to put the arm on this St. Louis character who's rigging the clearing house totals.

"Walt, you check with the phone company. Jerry, find us some drops and banks. After we get a report from the phone company, I'll go down to Saint Loo. Meanwhile, we keep the stake-out at the check-cashing service and the tail on Eddie Enrici."

O'Hara went up to Gail's around eleven that night, anticipating a couple of highballs and some relaxation from the pressure of the case. But as it turned out it was not to be.

She greeted him with a perfunctory kiss, after which she announced breathlessly: "Well, you thought I was kidding, but I wasn't. Want the names of the men who phone in the noon bond sale total to the back room of the check-cashing service? I've got them! They're Irving Ballou and Abner Gutknecht, and they work in the composing room of the *Dispatch!*"

He smiled uncertainly. "How did you find out?"

"I checked the *Interocean's* payroll first. It was easy to get from Mary Ingersoll, who works in the treasurer's office. No Ab or Irv there. Then I called people I know on the *Dispatch* and the *Herald*. The *Herald* was a washout, but George Hadley, sports editor of the *Dispatch,* whom I used to date once in awhile before you came along—a real sweet guy—said an Irv Ballou and an Ab Gutknecht worked as typesetters in the composing room. So there you are! Now, do I get a promotion?"

"Maybe. Have to check it out first. Might not be the right Irv and Ab."

She pouted. "Oh, come on, Steve! Give me some credit! How many Irvs and Abs are there working in the composing rooms of Chicago afternoon papers?"

"That what we have to find out, sweetie. You did real good and I'm proud of you. I only hope the news of your interest in Irv and Ab doesn't get back to Sam Fusco. Now, where's the bourbon?"

They drank and argued and played some records, but things were not quite right for love, so he cut out about midnight and drove the little TR-3 north on Michigan towards Fullerton, thinking about the damn case, and sorry he hadn't been more enthusiastic about Gails amateur sleuthing. After all, she was only trying to help him.

He thought of calling her and apologizing, but finally decided against it and went to bed after watching the one A.M. news on television.

When he reached his office the next morning he found Walt Brubaker's report on the phone calls made to and from the back room of the Pulaski Check-Cashing Service on his desk. The 'Ab' and 'Irv' calls in at 12:15 P.M. every day, the ones giving Eddie Enrici the total of the bond sales to noon, were coming from a pay phone booth on the third floor of the Chicago *Dispatch* building. The 1:45 P.M. call, the one which told Enrici what third digit was wanted, came from a bowling alley on North Avenue. The 2 P.M. call, passing the desired third digit on to St. Louis, was being made to a private, unlisted phone somewhere in the St. Louis clearing house.

The last call in the series, the 2:15 P.M. one out of the check-cashing service, was going to the bowling alley on North Avenue. There were other calls—and Brubaker had a record of them—to and from bars, cigar stores, night clubs, restaurants, and newsstands.

Steve O'Hara called Registration and Identification and asked what, if anything, was avaiable on Irving Ballou and Abner Gutknecht. While waiting for the information, he lit up a little cigar and pondered. Gail had been right, and he hadn't treated her well. He would have to make up for that. The bowling alley on North Avenue was probably the headquarters and main bank for this particular policy game.

Policy bank locations were kept as secret as possible, because sometimes there was as much as seventy-five, eighty, or even a hundred thousand dollars in one overnight —a temptation that might prove too much for rival gangsters, a hophead needing big dough to feed

his monkey, or a bunch of arrogant punks. Only a few top-echelon hoods know where a bank was located.

The drops, though, where the writers deposited their slips, were widely known. Many of those phone calls that were not a part of the 12:15—1:45-2—2:15 series were undoubtedly from drops, although the conversations between them and the back room of the check-cashing service were almost as cryptic and laconic as the ones in the series.

As he was pondering, a sergeant from R. and I. came in with the information on Irving Ballou and Abner Gutknecht. Both had minor records. Ballou was thirty-

six and had learned typesetting at a trade school. Between composing room jobs he had been arrested for writing policy, auto theft, and attempted rape. He had served six months in the Bridewell on the policy charge, had the auto theft nol prossed, and been acquitted of the attempted rape allegation.

Abnr Gutknecht was forty; he had worked in the composing and circulation departments of newspapers all his life. He had been arrested for slugging a picket during a newspaper strike, for being a common gambler, for drunken driving, and for driving to endanger. Altogether, he had put in about a year and a half of his life in jail.

These were unimportant punks on the fringe of hoodlumry whose newspaper jobs had made them temporarily important to men like Eddie Enrici and Sam Fusco. No need to keep an eye on them. They would stay put.

THAT AFTERNOON, at their daily skull session in Captain Pelswick's office, they all agreed that nearly all the pieces were in place. The only two missing were the identity of the key man in the whole operation, the St. Louis clearing house official who was rigging the daily total, and the location of the bank or banks and drops. The first was Steve O'Hara's job, the second Jerry Monohan's. And Jerry would have to do his first because as soon as the clearing house official was arrested the roof would fall in, and the rats would be scurrying to escape the wreckage. When that happened, every hole would have to be covered.

Steve and Jerry went over the long list of phone calls made to and from the back room of the check-cashing service. As they studied the figures, a pattern began to emerge. The calls were being made to and from the downtown Loop district, and in the Loop chiefly from the LaSalle Street area, where the stock exchange, the banks, and the big office buildings were.

There were no calls to or from the South and West Sides, poorer neighborhoods, where there was a big play in Chicago Wheel and the other kinds of policy favored by nickel, dime, and quarter bettors.

"What we've got here is some kind of white-collar policy," said Jerry Monohan. "Downtown office workers. Maybe even some executives."

"Betting real money?"

"I'd guess from half a buck to a buck a day, with some plungers going for a fin or even a ten-spot."

Steve O'Hara whistled. "Didn't know they sprang for that much."

Jerry nodded. "Some big execs who are real policy buffs go for a bill a day. They know how the winning number is made up and check the papers every day them-

selves. Pretty hard to con them, but it looks like Sam's doing it, thanks to that fixer in the St. Louis clearing house."

The bowling alley on North Avenue was put under surveillance. It did not open until 5 P.M., but from 10:30 A.M. on cars pulled into the alley's parking lot and discharged characters wearing medium-gray snapbrim hats, white-on-white shirts, dark, sharply tailored suits, and well-shined, pointed black shoes. Many of them carried bulging briefcases and one even had a green Boston bookbag.

By 3:30 P.M. the frenzy of activity was over; the big cars had gone; the parking lot was empty and quiet. That meant that sometime between 2:15 P.M.—the time of the final phone call in the series—and 3:15, the daily drawing had taken place.

Steve O'Hara, sitting in the stake-out car on several occasions, was able to identify Sam Fusco as one of the men getting out of a big black Cadillac and entering a side door of the bowling alley. Sam was a powerfully-built man with a pock-marked, dark face and malignant little brown eyes. He was the North Side boss, and Steve knew that only a powerful man, a dangerous man could become boss of the North Side and that he could not have reached such a height by persuasive argument alone. Sam Fusco was his own enforcer; he carried and knew how to use a gun both for pistol-whipping and killing, if that became necessary.

The bowling alley was obviously the main bank and headquarters of the policy ring. Here the daily winning number was ascertained, printed, and distributed by runners to the various drops in the downtown business district. The back room of the check-cashing service was a sort of message center and command post.

It did not take Jerry Monohan long to identify some fifteen policy drops in the downtown district. Traced telephone calls, tails put on runners, reports from stool-pigeons working in the Loop all combined to pin the label "drop" on an assortment of cigar stores, lobby newsstands, bars, bookstores, and restaurants. Each one was quietly staked out.

Every rat-hole was now covered. With the identification and arrest of the unknown fixer in the St. Louis clearing house, the trap would be sprung.

The night before he left for St. Louis, Steve O'Hara took Gail to see a new Italian movie at a Near North Side art theatre. Afterwards they went back to her apartment for a nightcap. When they were settled before the fireplace with their drinks on the coffee table, she turned a small, troubled face toward him.

"Steve," she almost whimpered,

"I don't like it. This St. Louis thing, I mean."

He laughed. "What's not to like? Just routine, ma'am. Find Mr. X, bring him back, and let the state's attorney take it from there."

She shook her head. "You make it sound simple, but it isn't. It's dangerous."

He sighed. "That's the name of the game, sweetie."

"This Mr. X—do you really need him?"

He took a long sip of his drink. "To break up the policy ring, no. To prove conspiracy and fraud, and hit Sam Fusco right in the *labonza*, yes."

She shivered. "Honey, please don't go. Send somebody else."

"You know I can't do that. Pull yourself together. This is just another milk run."

She was strangely depressed, which wasn't like her at all, and he stayed until after one A.M. trying unsuccessfully to reassure her. Finally he kissed her goodnight and left, after promising to come up to her place as soon as he returned to Chicago.

Next morning he and Sergeant Don Hughson flew down to St. Louis, and by noon were comfortably ensconced in a downtown hotel room not far from the St. Louis clearing house. The latter was a conservative-looking, soot-grimed building, twelve stories high, on Olive Street in the heart of the financial section. The executive offices were on the twelfth floor.

That afternoon, they unobtrusively cased the twelfth floor of the clearing house. They wandered up and down the halls, looked in on an empty board room, and located the offices of the president, assorted vice-presidents, and the secretary. Nobody bothered them.

Secretaries shuffled in and out of deep-wooded, deep-carpeted, well-appointed offices; every now and then an executive would appear, on his way to the men's room or to see another executive. They all wore conservative dark business suits and expensive black shoes. Their uniform, Steve O'Hara thought. They wear uniforms, just like the men from the Outfit.

That evening, hunkered down in their hotel room with the television on and plenty of beer and liverwurst on rye sandwiches to fortify then, they planned their strategy.

Steve O'Hara, they agreed, would pose as a job-seeker. Don Hughson would claim to be a newspaper reporter doing a feature story on the operations of clearing houses. Concentrating on the twelfth floor, they would interview anybody who would talk to them and try to find out who was responsible for the final issuing of the daily clearing house total to the press. That, plus the location of a phone that was answered every day at 2 P.M., should do the job.

It sounded easy, and as a matter of fact, it turned out to be easy. Amazingly so.

THE FOLLOWING morning Hughson, posing as a reporter, got an interview with a vice-president in charge of public relations who was only too happy to explain the operation of the clearing house in detail. Hughson questioned him carefully, and when he met Steve O'Hara in the lobby at lunch-time he was smiling from ear to ear. The clearing house official who released the daily total to the press, he said, was the secretary, one William N. Ballinger. Ballinger's office was in Room 1218.

After a quick lunch of franks and beans and black coffee in a luncheonette around the corner, the two detectives returned to the twelfth floor of the clearing house. They had no difficulty in locating the office of the secretary. It was directly opposite a large, empty board of directors' meeting room.

Steve O'Hara, posing as a jobseeker, entered Ballinger's office. "I'd like to see the secretary," he told the receptionist-secretary.

"Your name?" she asked politely.

"Stephen O'Hara."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No."

"Why do you want to see Mr. Ballinger?"

O'Hara thought hard. "It's important—personal. I was referred to Mr. Ballinger by—by Mr. Evans."

Evans was the name of the vice-president in charge of public relations who was being interviewed by Sergeant Hughson.

She looked at him doubtfully. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she buzzed the inner office on the intercom. "A Mr. Stephen O'Hara here to see you," she said. "A personal matter. Referred to you by Mr. Evans."

She smiled at Steve. "Go right in, Mr. O'Hara."

He thanked her and walked into the inner office. A smiling, smooth-shaven, gray-haired man in his early sixties motioned him to a chair beside the elegant mahogany desk.

"Mr. O'Hara," Ballinger murmured politely. "What can I do for you?"

Steve's mind was racing. Nothing seemed less probable than that this well-dressed, courteous, smiling executive was the fixer in a mean underworld policy swindle.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm looking for a job."

Ballinger continued to smile. "Well now," he said easily, "I don't know why Mr. Evans referred you to me. I don't do any hiring."

O'Hara rushed on. "I've had some brokerage experience. I think I'd fit in nicely here."

The still-smiling Ballinger nodded. "I'm sure you would, but you

want the Personnel Department. It's just down the hall here in room twelve twenty-three."

Steve O'Hara stalled desperately. It was almost two o'clock. He asked several rather pointless questions, all of which Ballinger answered politely, although he was obviously trying to get rid of his job-seeking visitor.

It was exactly six minutes to two when O'Hara, unable to stall any longer without arousing suspicion, finally left, ostensibly to go to the Personnel Department in Room 1223. Hughson was once again interviewing Mr. Evans in his role of reporter, so Steve was alone in his surveillance of the polite, genial Ballinger. He walked up and down the spacious corridor, trying not to appear conspicuous, and carefully watching the door to Ballinger's office.

At half a minute before two, Ballinger emerged from his office, crossed the hall, and entered the empty board of directors' meeting room. He closed the door, which had previously been open.

Steve O'Hara, just outside the closed door, bent down to slowly untie and then tie the laces on both his shoes. At exactly two he heard the phone ring. Then came Ballinger's faintly-heard answer: "This is Bill."

O'Hara boldly opened the door and walked in, just in time to hear Ballinger say: "I understand. See you at four."

Ballinger, seated alone at the long table, hung up the phone, and, still smiling and unruffled, looked questioningly at O'Hara.

Steve said: "Oh, sorry! I seem to have opened the wrong door."

"Mr. O'Hara. Still looking for Personnel? It's in room twelve twenty-three." Ballinger was cool as a cucumber.

O'Hara apologized again and backed out.

He ran into Don Hughson, just emerging from Mr. Evans' office. "Got him," Steve said in a low voice. "Ballinger's our man. The phone's in the empty board room. Let's get back to the hotel."

Back at the hotel, they spelled it out. Hughson would return to the clearing house and tail Ballinger. O'Hara would contact the St. Louis police, fill them in on the case, and ask for assistance in making the arrest. Then he would call Captain Pelswick in Chicago and arrange a pounce on the check-cashing service, the North Avenue bowling alley, and the drops that Jerry Monohan had uncovered in the Loop.

After a phone call to Chicago and a visit to the St. Louis Police Department, O'Hara returned to the hotel to endure the hours of waiting that were inevitable in all police work.

He chain-smoked little cigars. He paced the floor. He turned on the television. He sent down for the latest afternoon paper, and

noted without surprise that the final digit of the day's clearing house total was a four—the same number that he had heard Ballinger repeat over the phone a few hours before. He tried to read the rest of the paper, without much success. He was too keyed up.

Hughson returned to the hotel about ten P.M. He looked beat.

"Well?" Steve O'Hara demanded impatiently.

Hughson flopped into a chair and pushed his hat back. "It's hard to believe. The guy's a pillar of society. Lives out in a swanky suburb called St. Charles, in a big, beautiful house. Wife's very active in church and club work. They go to church together every Sunday—never miss. Now, why would an old boy who's got it made, and who's only a couple of years away from a fat pension, want to play games with a polecat like Sam Fusco?"

"We don't ask why, Don. That's for the skull docs. Anything else?"

"Yeah. The police chief out in St. Charles says a group of citizens out there is going to run Ballinger for mayor next fall."

"How did you put it to the chief?"

"Said it was a routine Internal Revenue check. Asked him if Ballinger had any kind of a police record. He just laughed."

O'Hara sighed. "Good. The toughest part of this job is coming up."

"What's that? The arrest?"

"Not the arrest. Getting this pigeon back to Chicago in one piece. Sam Fusco isn't going to like this one damned little bit."

The arrest was set for 2 P.M. the following day, when Ballinger would be receiving his phone call from Chicago.

Next morning Steve O'Hara breathed a sigh of relief as William Ballinger entered his office at a little before ten, smiling as usual, impeccably dressed, and apparently unaware of any surveillance. If *he* didn't know, that meant that Sam Fusco was still unaware of the imminent arrest of the key figure in his conspiracy to defraud the white-collar chumps of Chicago's financial district.

At a little before two Ballinger stepped jauntily across the hall to the empty board room. Steve

O'Hara, Sergeant Hughson, and a Lieutenant O'Malley from the Vice Squad of the St. Louis Police Department, loitering outside the closed door, heard the phone ring and quickly, quietly entered the board room.

Ballinger looked up, surprised, but continued his phone conversation. Then he said: "Fine, see you at seven," and hung up.

"Well," he said, looking at O'Hara, "we seem to keep running into each other. What can I do for you today?"

O'Hara showed him his wallet with the detective's badged pinned to it. "Police," he said. "You must come with us, Mr. Ballinger. We can do it the hard way or the easy way. Lieutenant O'Malley here has a warrant for your arrest."

The smile faded; the patrician face sagged and went gray. He said in a low voice: "What is the charge?"

"Conspiracy to defraud is the big one. There are others."

"May I call my lawyer?" It was almost a whisper.

"Certainly," O'Hara said. "Go right ahead!"

He reached for the phone, held it in a shaking hand for a moment, and then slowly put it back. "No," he said. "I'm not going to involve him in this—this slime. I'm guilty. And you know something? I'm glad you caught me. Perhaps tonight I'll be able to sleep."

Steve O'Hara couldn't help asking: "How did it happen, Mr. Ballinger?"

"Agh!" Ballinger jerked his head in a gesture of self-disgust. "It's an old story. I went to a convention in Las Vegas. Gambled, lost, and couldn't pay without using funds that would have required explanations to my family. A big gambler out there told me there was an easy way out—this. I was a fool. I took it."

"How much did they pay you?"

"Two thousand a month. Plus, of course, the cancellation of my gambling debt."

Ballinger proved cooperative. He agreed to go to Chicago, testify before the grand jury, and, in pleading guilty himself, involve Sam Fusco and Eddie Enrici in the same conspiracy. The usual formalities were gone through at St. Louis Police Headquarters, and Ballinger, after a tearful goodbye to his wife, two married sons, and several grandchildren, went back with the Chicago officers to their hotel room. Lieutenant O'Malley stayed with them.

They had their man, but they also had a new problem—how to keep him alive to testify before the grand jury. By now Sam Fusco would know. Ballinger's arrest had triggered raids in Chicago, and in St. Louis the later afternoon edition of the paper had a three-column head on the front page: SECRETARY OF CLEARING HOUSE ARRESTED AS POLICY FIXER. *Wil-*

liam Ballinger Admits Guilt, Waives Formal Extradition, Agrees To Tell All To Chicago Grand Jury.

AT THE HOTEL, Steve O'Hara chain-smoked little cigars again. Sergeant Hughson and Lieutenant O'Malley sent down for roast beef sandwiches and beer, and began a game of gin rummy. Ballinger read about himself in the latest edition of the paper and took an occasional pull on a strong bourbon and branchwater.

How to get Ballinger up to Chicago was the immediate problem. Fly? Too public; there was no privacy possible on a plane. Borrow a car from the St. Louis police and drive him up? Too slow and too risky—a car could easily be followed and ambushed.

That left only the train. O'Hara called the Wabash. Yes, they had a bedroom that would sleep four on the Blue Express, leaving St. Louis that night at 11 P.M. and arriving in Chicago the next morning at eight.

O'Hara made the reservation. It was then 5:wo P.M. Five and a half hours to sweat it out.

There was a soft knock on the door. "Who is it?" demanded O'Hara.

"Room Service."

The beer and roast beef sandwiches ordered by Sergeant Hughson and Lieutenant O'Malley. Steve O'Hara unbolted the door and two bellhops, resplendent in red uniforms with gold trim, wheeled in a small serving table holding two bottles of beer, two glasses, and a silver tray covered by a snowy white, lace-embroidered napkin.

O'Hara had a sudden hunch. As the bellhops, both men in their early thirties, reached towards the tray, he kicked over the serving cart and yanked the Smith and Wesson .38 from his shoulder holster.

The beer bottles and glasses crashed to the floor. The napkin flew off the tray to reveal, not roast beef sandwiches, but two snub-nosed, ugly black automatics. Tray and guns fell into the broken glass on the floor. The bellhops dove for the guns.

O'Hara kicked them out of reach and brought the butt of his .38 down across the nose of one of the "bellhops". The man fell to the floor with a moan, blood rushing from his broken nose. By now Hughson and O'Malley had reacted to the sudden violence and the latter seized the other gunman in a judo grip, while Hughson jammed the barrel of a .38 into his gut.

Ballinger, a look of amazement on his face, did not move. As O'Hara handcuffed the two pseudo-bellboys together, he cried: "What in God's name is *this* all about?"

Steve O'Hara said tersely:

"They want you dead, Mr. Ballinger".

Ballinger paled.

O'Malley recognized the two "bellhops". They were East St. Louis hoodlums, professional gunmen. Sam Fusco hadn't wasted any time.

Lieutenant O'Malley called the St. Louis Police Department and two detectives came around to take the prisoners to headquarters for booking. How the hell had Sam Fusco managed so quickly to work two killers into the hotel room where Ballinger was being held? Finding the answer to that one would be a headache for the local cops. O'Hara's problem was the same as before—how to get Ballinger back to Chicago alive.

Hughson looked at O'Hara admiringly. "Steve, what tipped you on those guys?"

O'Hara rubbed at the bloodstains on his shirt with the corner of a wet towel. He said: "We've had stuff sent up from Room Service three or four times, haven't we?"

"Yes, but—".

"Ever see two bell jockeys bring it up before? A lousy two beers and two sandwiches?"

"No, never more than one—"

"And *he* wasn't a bellhop. He was a waiter. Waiters bring up stuff from Room Service in this hotel. It suddenly hit me that these guys weren't waiters and that there were too many of 'em, that's all."

A hotel chambermaid came in and cleaned up the mess, grimacing at the pool of blood on the carpet and the blood-stained towel that had been used to try to stanch the flow from the gunman's broken nose. More sandwiches and beer were ordered. Ballinger, badly shaken, lay on one of the twin beds, with a fresh highball on the night table.

The officers looked grim; three well-built men with their jackets off, each wearing a shoulder-holster with a fully-loaded .38 in it. Whoever tried to take Ballinger away from them would have one hell of a Pier Six on his hands.

They took Ballinger to the St. Louis Union Station in a police paddy wagon. O'Malley was to accompany them to Chicago; he and Steve O'Hara hurried Ballinger, handcuffed to Hughson, down the gloomy old train shed to the waiting pullman. Once in the bedroom that had been assigned to them, he locked the door.

"That doesn't open until tomorrow morning, in Chicago," O'Hara told them firmly.

Nobody slept. The night passed with agonizing slowness. They smoked and said little. Ballinger undressed and lay on one of the narrow pullman beds in his underwear; he seemed to doze occasionally. The train hurtled north toward Chicago in the deep prairie darkness, leaving each of the unsleeping men in Bedroom C with

his own thoughts about what the morning would bring.

The sun rose redly in the east, tinting the north-speeding train a menacing crimson. In Bedroom C, four men, their jowls stubbled with beard, splashed cold water on their faces, and continued their grim waiting, but with less intensity now. It was getting light, and Chicago was only two hours away. O'Hara had wired Captain Pelswick to meet the train with at least four detectives and a paddy wagon.

THE TRAIN SCHEDULE called for two stops in Chicago—63rd Street, and Union Station. The latter was a huge, bustling downtown depot, which, by now would be thoroughly staked out by Captain Bill Pelswick's welcoming party. The 63rd Street station was a small, plain, wooden affair set on a low grassy knoll in a South Side residential area. South and West Side suburbanites usually left trains at 63rd Street; all others continued on to the main depot west of the Loop.

As the train slowed for the 63rd Street stop, the conductor came through the cars, shouting: "Change for downtown at Sixty-third Street! All change for busses to Union Station!"

They looked at one another in consternation. Steve O'Hara ran down the aisle and grabbed the conductor. "Why aren't we going downtown?" he demanded. "The damned trains always go downtown!"

"Not this one, not today. About ten minutes ago an overhead foot bridge collapsed at Fifty-Seventh Street. Take 'em about two hours to clear the track."

Goddam it, O'Hara thought furiously, is it on the level, or has Sam Fusco outsmarted us?

Back in Bedroom C, they debated. Should they assume that the collapsed bridge was legit and take Ballinger downtown on one of the buses provided by the railroad? They discarded that immediately as too risky. Wait in the stalled train until the men on stake-out at Union Station could reach them? That would make them sitting ducks for at least half an hour. Grab a taxi and make a run for it?

They finally agreed on the taxi. If Sam Fusco's boys were on the

prowl for them, the taxi, which had mobility, was their best bet. At least they wouldn't be playing Sam's game. They'd have a chance.

The train was running slowly along the station platform now. A line of yellow taxis was drawn up just across the platform—a matter of perhaps a dozen feet away. The stern-faced men with the stubbles of beard on their cheeks checked their .38's and replaced them in their shoulder-holsters.

Ballinger was not hand-cuffed. He wasn't going anywhere. His only chance to stay alive was to stick close to the three officers.

They stood in the crowded aisle with the other passengers, trying to be inconspicuous. Hughson was carrying the suitcase that he and Steve had taken to St. Louis. O'Malley, trying to look unconcerned, lit a cigarette.

The train shuddered to a stop. With O'Hara in the lead, they ignored the outstretched hand of the pullman porter, walked swiftly across the platform, and jumped into the first cab in line.

"Canalport and Halsted," Steve barked at the driver. "Make it fast!"

O'Hara sat up front with the driver. Ballinger was in the back between O'Malley and Hughson. Behind the line of taxis they could see the chartered green buses that were to take the train passengers to Union Station.

The approach to the station was a long, curved roadway that debouched upon a busy two-way thoroughfare lined with neighborhood stores and shops—63rd Street, the main business street of a residential section of the South-Side known as Englewood.

They had almost reached it when a black Cadillac sedan suddenly pulled into the roadway in front of them, blocking them off from 63rd Street. Behind them brakes screamed and horns blatted indignantly.

Another Caddie, this one a dark blue, slipped past the blocking car and headed swiftly towards them. From the rolled-down back window there emerged the ugly snout of a Thompson sub-machine gun.

O'Hara had just time to yell, "Hit the deck!"—before hell broke loose. Behind him, Hughson shoved Ballinger down on the floor and sprawled protectively on top of him. O'Malley, sitting on the side nearest the oncoming blue Cadillac, whipped out his .38, thanked God the window was already rolled down, and began shooting at the car rushing toward him.

O'Hara, in almost a single motion, opened the door of the taxi, rolled out, drew his gun, and, prone in the street, blazed away at the blue Cadillac, now not more than ten feet away.

In the back seat were three men and the Thompson gun, which was

now coughing and spitting fire. A lines of holes appeared as if by magic on the side of the taxi; more holes dotted the windshield, which collapsed into the lap of the driver, who sprawled over the wheel, blood oozing from three small holes in his head and throat. He was already dead.

The blue Caddie was opposite the taxi now. There were holes in its windshield, too, and the man in the front seat beside the driver was slumped forward, a crimson stain spreading over his white shirt-front. The Thompson gun continued to spit and O'Malley fell forward, his gun clattering into the street.

O'Hara was on his feet now. As the blue Caddie passed the taxi, he took dead aim on the driver, leading him just a little, and fired. The driver straightened convulsively and then fell forward over the wheel, the back of his head literally blown off. His foot hit the accelerator; the Caddie shot crazily ahead, and smashed into the line of taxis.

Three men bolted from the back seat. Steve O'Hara aimed carefully at one and brought him down with the last bullet in the chamber. The other two ran—straight into the arms of two railroad policemen.

The blocking black Cadillac now tried to get away, only to find 63rd Street an impenetrable mass of stalled vehicles and white-faced, panicky people. The three men in it jumped out and began to run back up towards the station, only to find themselves confronted by Sergeant Hughson with drawn gun. He had jumped off of Ballinger as soon as the blue Cadillac had passed the taxi, the interior of which was now a bloody shambles.

It had happened so fast—a matter of a few seconds. The blazing moment of truth that was the culmination of hours, days, months of dull routine.

In the bullet-riddled taxi, the driver was dead. O'Malley, slumped in the back seat, was bleeding from wounds in the chest and head. Ballinger, trembling and terrified, was unhurt, at least physically. Steve O'Hara had a wound in the scalp and a painful shoulder separation received when he had rolled out of the cab. Hughson had three holes in his jacket but was unhurt.

In the blue Cadillac the driver, whom O'Hara recognized as Spider Humphrey, was draped over the wheel, dead, blood and brains oozing slowly from the back of his head. Mike Alteri, unconscious on the seat beside him, was losing blood fast from bubbly wounds in the neck and chest.

Of the three men who had been in the back seat of the blue Caddie, one, whom O'Hara recognized as Eddie Enrici, lay where Steve had dropped him in the

roadway beside the string of taxis, twitching spasmodically but still alive with a bullet in his back.

The other two men, lined up by the railroad police against the hood of their smashed car, were unhurt.

They were a snarling Sam Fusco, his dark face livid with rage, and a man whom Steve O'Hara recognized as a Detroit hoodlum known as the Hit Kid because of his ability as an executioner with his favorite weapon, the outmoded but lethal Thompson sub-machine gun.

It was over as quickly as it had begun. After the spate of gunfire and the crashing of glass, there was eerie silence for a few seconds. Then there was a cacophony of sirens and horns, the excited gabble of human voices, police whistles, the groans of the wounded men.

Captain Bill Pelswick arrived to take charge of Ballinger and the prisoners. Ambulances rushed Steve O'Hara, Lieutenant O'Malley, Mike Alteri, and Eddie Enrici to the nearby South Side Hospital. A dead wagon arrived from the Cook County morgue for the unlucky taxi driver who had been first in line at the 63rd Street station that morning, and Spider Humphrey, the good wheelman who hadn't been quite good enough.

Steve O'Hara was conscious only of being tired—so tired. He hardly felt the pain in his separated shoulder, but realized that he was unable to lift his left hand above his waist. The flesh wound in his scalp was bloody but superficial. At the hospital they dressed it, bound his left arm firmly to his chest with surgical tape, put him in bed, and gave him two grains of seconal. Gratefully, he let himself drift off into the black velvet darkness.

It was late in the afternoon when he woke up. His shoulder was sore and he had a thumping headache from the crease in his scalp, but otherwise he felt pretty good. But he was depressed; you do not kill a man, or maybe two men, even caricatures of men like Spider Humphrey and Eddie Enrici, without feeling something.

It was all a part of being a cop, sure, but one never could—never should—get used to it.

The docs wanted him to stay overnight at the hospital, but he refused. Hot got dressed, looking, with his bandaged head and left arm in a sling, like one of the walking wounded.

Six o'clock! Gail would be home. He took a cab up to her place on Superior Street. Wordlessly, they embraced, a difficult feat for a man with only one arm available. She'd heard the news at noon over a television set in the *Interocean* office, and had taken the rest of the day off.

Gail had come to the hospital,

but they wouldn't let her see him. They had said that he was resting comfortably, and that he would probably be discharged sometime the next day. Now here he was, in her arms. She cried quietly.

After awhile she mixed him a strong bourbon highball and made a fire in the fireplace, and he sat there sipping the drink gratefully, his feet stretched out toward the fire and his shoes off. After a second highball he could tell her about it, and did.

"That's the end of that," he concluded. "Spider Humphrey and an innocent cab driver dead, Eddie Enrici and Mike Alteri in the hospital, the Hit Kid and Sam Fusco in jail. Alteri may not make it. On our side, a hell of a good St. Louis detective named Pat O'Malley in the hospital, but the docs say he'll probably be okay. And Ballinger is safe and sound and ready to sing to the grand jury."

"And you," she said softly, nuzzling him. "Don't forget you."

He shrugged—and winced with pain. "Me? I'm a cop. Period."

Gail made bacon and scrambled eggs, and they had coffee, and more bourbon, and then, with his right arm around her, they sat on the loveseat and listened to records—Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy—the deep, moving, sad music of life that spoke of man's desire and loneliness.

A week from tomorrow, after they took his bandages off, Steve O'Hara, cop, would prowl the North Side or the South Side or the West Side in his little blue TR-3, and the whole thing would start all over again.

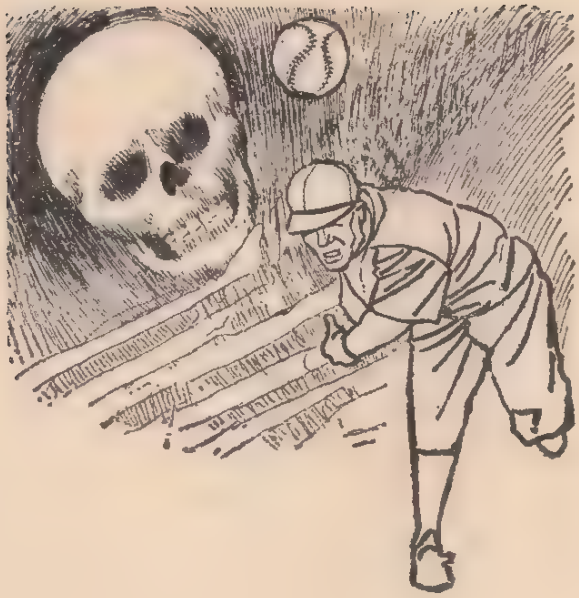
For that was the name of the game—danger.

Next Month—A Complete Novelet

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

An outstanding suspense thriller by the famous author of "Rear Window" and "The Phantom Lady."



KILLER in the BLEACHERS

by WALTER DALLAS

The double-action crime play had thirty thousand spectators.

DETECTIVE STEVE Ames beamed down at his young son sitting next to him. "To kids a big moment in baseball is like a lighted Christmas tree," he said, turning to his partner, Robert Fuller. "That's why we're here. Stevie Junior likes the real stuff better than television."

He was trying to arrange himself so that his toes wouldn't always be squeezed up against the back of the seat in front of him here in the bleachers. Suddenly he became rigid, forgetting the game almost completely. He looked down at the crowded rows of seats which sloped to the green of the outfield. He stared for almost a full minute, then glanced at his partner.

"Bob, look down to the second row. Isn't that Rock Wilson?"

Ames had to nudge Bob Fuller twice before his handsome partner took notice of the man six rows beneath him—a young man who looked serious.

"The whole force is after him since he disappeared a year ago," Ames whispered. "He always carries a gun and boasts that if he's caught a cop will get it, too."

"The crowd's too big for us to do anything now," Bob Fuller said. He turned to his partner's other

side. "Keep your eyes on the batter, Junior," he said. "That's Fred Jensen."

Stevie Ames nodded his small blond head with all the patience he'd learned in eight years of living, and craned his neck to see what was happening on the field.

"There's the three-two pitch—and a walk," Fuller explained to his partner's child. "A sacrifice will get Jensen to second, but the pitcher is the man to watch now. He's great!"

"Forget the game for a minute, can't you?" Ames snapped. "Didn't you and that hood have a tank room session a few years ago? He's sure to remember that grilling if he sees you now, and he's wanted for *murder*. That pitcher out there isn't worrying about staying one jump ahead of the electric chair."

"I'll wait out of sight until we can pick him up, if I can't think of any other way to get him," Bob Fuller said, standing. "Should I take Junior with me?"

"No," Ames said firmly. "You must be out of your mind. If he should see you and Stevie in the last row together—"

Fuller walked out of the aisle, but the inconvenience to others at an unexpectedly tense moment in the game resulted in noises that rippled downwards. Abruptly the killer turned. His coal-black eyes rested briefly on Fuller, then swung back to the empty seat next to the taut-faced detective and the small boy at his side. Ames sat perfectly still, tormentingly aware that he wasn't carrying a gun.

Stevie Ames, gazing to his right, suddenly said in a conversational tone, "Uncle Bob must like baseball an awful lot."

"He sure does," Ames said through his teeth. "But don't get soda pop on your pants."

There was noise from the crowd again and the killer, avoiding Bob Fuller's previous mistake, got up inconspicuously and trained his gaze on Ames sitting there with his son.

Ames glanced around for just a second, hoping to catch sight of Bob Fuller. But his partner wasn't in the aisle at all. How stupid could you get? If Fuller had gone to make a call for reinforcements it would be far too late by the time they arrived. Rock Wilson was certainly going to move first.

Ames wiped his red face with a handkerchief and made an attempt to dry part of his shirt by stretching its back away from his body.

Wilson started walking up the concrete stairs. Almost before Ames realized it, Wilson was stepping past a row of drawn up legs, and making his way to the detective's side.

"The kid comes with me," he said to Ames. His voice was soft, almost friendly. But Ames could hear it distinctly above the restless chattering of fans and the tired chants of the vendors. "If the kid's with me, I'm safe."

"Now wait a minute," Ames protested, his voice hoarse with strain. "I don't know you. You've made a mistake—"

"Don't tell me you're not a cop! I've been watching you. I can tell. And don't try to make me think your buddy, who I know personally, isn't phoning, right now, for more cops." Then to Stevie, "Come on, kid, you're taking a walk."

Ames reached out with his right hand to keep his now frightened little boy close to him.

"I can give it to him right here or send him back if he behaves," the killer said quickly. "Which do you—*uhhh!*"

Rock Wilson whirled around, wide-eyed, clapped his hand to his brow and swayed like a drunken man for an instant. Then his knees gave way and he collapsed across two hastily emptied seats in a downward plunge that sent his drawn gun spinning. Ames grabbed instantly for the killer's loose gun.

Amidst a flurry of startled spectators in the immediate vicinity one man held up a grimy baseball. "Where did this come from?" he asked, puzzled.

Steve Ames spun around to the nearest aisle. Bob Fuller was standing not too far away next to the uniformed player with a glove in one hand. Ames recognized him as one of the great pitchers in baseball. He realized that the ballplayer had used perfect control in aiming a baseball directly at the killer.

Fuller came over to them while Rock Wilson was being taken away in a stretcher, and smiled at Stevie Junior.

"Wasn't that a great pitch, Stevie?" he said, chuckling.

Steve Ames swore under his breath. Fuller was a nice guy and all, but he never took anything seriously.

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CHICKEN CONTEST

It was the kind of ugly game that only young hoodlums played. And the referee was Death.

by MORRIS HERSHMAN

LARRY REITZ could sense that it was building up, and that there was no way to stop it. He stood under the lamppost and listened as Skeets Carty growled out: "Chicken talk, that's all! The yellow is running out from your collar."

Phil said grimly, "I'll do anything you will."

"That's a deal, punk." Skeets was solemn. He hitched up his pants and gave an unpleasant grin, showing his yellow teeth. "You've always been scared of heights."

It was time for Larry to interfere. He said urgently, "Let's not do anything we'll be sorry for. You know the way Phil feels about heights."

Phil Kramer swore under his breath. A couple of years ago, his father had climbed out on a window ledge in their top floor tenement apartment, and kept the cop emergency squads at bay for over an hour. Then he had jumped off.

Phil said, tight-lipped, "what is it you have in mind. Name it."

"Well, we can do a little something I learned about up at the Big Place."

Skeets smiled when he referred to the State Reformatory. But he didn't feel like smiling. Just remembering what the Royal Purples had been saying about his

girl made him feel like crippling Phil for life. Hoodlum rumor had gone out that Phil had been two-timing with Peggy while he had been sweating out his term in a big wooden barracks with young punks he wouldn't have spoken to twice outside.

"We'll do this," Skeets said grimly. "We go up to a height and then jump off. What's the matter? You look scared."

"Who do you think you're kidding." Phil swallowed. But he looked sick under the lamplight's harsh white glow. "Name a place you want us to jump off."

"The Narrows."

Phil Kramer drew in a shocked breath. "Wait now, look—you don't mean that!"

"Sure I do." Skeets Carty was grinning. "It ain't more than a couple hundred feet down into the river. If anything happens to one of us—well, that's how the breaks go."

Phil started to say something, but he kept his lips tight together instead, and turned to Larry.

"I'll be the ref," Larry said slowly. "Let's get a move on."

The three of them walked slowly along the ill-lit streets. Larry Reitz was first and the other two stayed well back of him and some ten feet from each other. When Larry suddenly glanced back, he saw Skeets looking contemptuously toward Phil and Phil sticking out his chin as he walked.

Skeets called out sharply, "What are you two crawling for?"

"We're practically there, Skeets," Larry answered quickly. "Don't you remember the way? It hasn't been so long that you'd forget it."

The Narrows, as the bridge was called, wasn't very long. There was a path at each side for people who'd want to walk across. The metal rails were smooth surfaces broken up by a series of knob-like projections, each coming to a point. Every ninth knob had been replaced by a lamppost which wasn't usually lighted.

"The bridge looks crummier than it used to," Skeets snarled, his voice growing a little ghostly in the soft wind. "Okay, we can do it here. Right at this here place we can get started. All clear down below."

"There are no cars coming, and I don't see a sign of anybody watching," Larry said.

Skeets said, turning to Phil Kramer, "How you feeling, punk?"

"Never felt better!" Phil answered after a pause. "It used to be a lot colder here."

"Maybe you're feeling kind of warm and that makes the whole difference." Skeets Carty threw back his big head and laughed. When he was serious again, he said, "We'll do it together."

"Why not? That suits me fine." Sweatdrops showed dully on Phil Kramer's face.

"Okay, let's climb."

Carefully, Skeets lifted a foot into a circular cavity in the metalwork and, holding onto a knob, he sat down on the rail. Still holding the knob, he straightened himself and stepped down to a ledge so narrow he stood on tiptoes.

"How about this, huh? I must be looking like your old man when he knocked himself off. Get out here, Phil."

Phil Kramer was very slow about it, his breath coming hard. His eyes bulged as his hands gripped one of the pointed knobs. He called out when he felt Skeets half-touching, half-pushing him.

"So far, so good," Skeets said. "Now turn around so you can look out. You can't see no water, but turn, anyhow."

It took Phil a minute. Then Larry Reitz, standing back of the rail, said quietly, "I'll count to five, then you both jump. One, two, three, four—"

In the pause, Skeets Carty said disgustedly, "Who needs a count!" One minute he was on the ledge, the next minute his body whistled through the night.

Phil shuddered, then turned as best he could and climbed back up the rail until he was next to Larry Reitz on the bridge.

He said quietly, "Skeets was away for such a long time he didn't know that the city was draining the river at this point to put up a new housing project."

The only answer was the sound of a sickening thud below, which was followed by silence.

In the next issue—

MR. SMITH GOES TO BERLIN

AN EXCITING NEW SPY THRILLER

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

No Loose Ends

To be a perfectionist in crime can sometimes start a killer on a long walk to the electric chair.

by DENNIS LYNDS

WALTER PETTIBONE was on the run. Walter did not like it. He had always been the chaser, not the chased, and after three months of hasty departures from various cities he found himself jumping at the shadows of shadows. Walter had no choice but to use his 'insurance.'

Walter's first mistake had been to go into business for himself. His business was murder. Despite his unlikely name, Walter was the prime executioner for a many-tentacled crime syndicate headed at the moment by Frank Arista. Arista had risen through the ranks, and Walter had always thought he was a lot smarter than Frank.

Walter was a big man, but his manner was mild and even flabby, and he was rarely noticed in a crowd. After fifteen years even his name was unknown to the police, and to most of the employees of the Syndicate. It was this quality of anonymity that had made The Fixer send Walter to the Syndicate in the first place. Big Mike Colismo had been Boss then. Walter had joined the Syndicate, and he was still prime executioner after six different Bosses had come and gone.

"I'm tired of working for chicken-feed," Walter told The Fixer. "The Syndicate gets all the gravy."

"Frank won't like it," The Fixer said. "Free-lance won't pay, believe me."

"You work for yourself," Walter said.

"I'm special," The Fixer said.

It was The Fixer who had discovered Walter's talent. That was a sideline to The Fixer's regular

A fast-paced crime thriller.

work, which was 'fixing.' He fixed the police, rival gangs, intra-gang disputes, and other delicate negotiations. He was everyone's friend, and he was left alone. The Fixer was the only man you could talk to.

"Don't do it, Walter," The Fixer advised.

"I'm smarter than Frank," Walter said.

"I think maybe you are," The Fixer said, "but Arista's got the muscle and the hardware."

"I've got 'insurance' of my own," Walter said.

The Fixer raised a surprised eyebrow.

"Insurance?" The Fixer said. "What kind of insurance?"

"Frank'll find out if he pushes me," Walter said.

"You mean that Frank's been careless?"

"You might say."

"Well, well," The Fixer said. "Good luck, Walter."

Walter was good at his work. Since he had disposed of his first victim fifteen years ago, he had made no mistakes. That first job had netted him one hundred dollars—a small-time numbers runner who had run the wrong way with Syndicate money. The Fixer had supplied both the .38 caliber revolver, and the money for that job. Since then Walter Pettibone had increased his pay a great deal.

He had learned to blend into shadows, to overlook nothing, and had 'covered' himself by taking a full Public Accountant's certificate. That CPA had always been the best part of Walter's 'cover', and it was an integral part of his 'insurance.'

He was still carried on the Syndicate books as an accountant. It gave him a reason to know Frank Arista, without being involved in crime. His neighbors in Brooklyn Heights still considered him a well-paid but dull accountant. They had no idea of just how well paid he was, but, in a way, they were not far wrong about his profession—he did 'settle accounts', with a deadly kind of efficiency.

His life suited him. He liked his work, he did it quietly and without a trace of anything as messy as evidence, and he had never been arrested, much less charged. He was meticulous, frugal, and careful. He neither drank, nor smoked, nor chased women. His only vice was gambling, and he was good at that. He had a mathematical mind. So, all-in-all, he enjoyed his life. It angered him to give it up for a stupid punk like Frank Arista.

"Run fast and far, Walter. That's all you can do."

That was the advice of the only man he could turn to in his trouble, The Fixer.

"Never risk a showdown," The Fixer said, "you might lose. I taught you that a long time ago. That's how I've made it alive so long. You've got money. Blow."

"Maybe Frank will cool down," Walter said hopefully.

"Maybe, but don't assume it, don't assume anything," The Fixer said. "Don't make another mistake."

The mistake had been one small free-lance contract, and his own careful nature. Walter made a point of never knowing the names of his victims. He had always felt that was safer. One dark night he filled his free-lance contract—on one Wade Schultz, who turned out to be a new but prized employee of Frank Arista himself. Frank howled with rage, and Walter was in deep trouble.

Walter wanted to explain, but he could hardly explain such an error even to himself. He had been, he admitted to himself, careless and over eager on his first free-lance job.

"I was wrong," Walter said to The Fixer, "Fix it for me."

"You were more than wrong, Walter. You were careless," The Fixer said.

"Get me off the hook," Walter said. "Frank listens to you."

"He's worried about you, Walter, I can't fix that," The Fixer said.

"Try," Walter said.

But Frank Arista could not be fixed. The gang-boss went into executive session with his two highest Lieutenants, Morgan Stein and Maxie Palermo. Both Stein and Palermo pointed out the obvious problem. If Walter could kill Wade Schultz, anyone could be next. The only thing more dangerous than an angry hoodlum is a scared hoodlum. The contract went out on Walter Pettibone.

Walter ran until he reached Dallas, Texas. Then he made his second big mistake.

HIS SECOND MISTAKE, Walter analyzed later, had been really unavoidable. His cash was tied up abroad. He had long ago established secret residence in a small foreign city under an assumed name, so that when he retired he would have a place to go where his arrival would not be in any way unusual.

So he carried a few hundred dollars in Traveller's Checks, as befitted any good accountant, and he found himself short in Dallas. Unemployed as he was, his only sure source of quick money was a gambling house. Walter was a polished cheat at cards, and he made a tidy sum. But the disguise he'd worn had proved not good enough.

The night after his gambling venture, he was oiling his best weapon—a silenced .25 caliber Beretta small enough to carry in his inside pocket without a bulge—and checking the edge and point of his Swedish steel clasp knife.

As he worked in pleasant silence, his trained ear heard a light *click*. His expert mind told him at once—the metal tip of a

shoelace striking the fire escape.

His cheap hotel room had a fire escape because, in his considered judgment, the advantage of immediate exit outweighed the danger of quick access to him. But a fire escape was a danger, so Walter had taken his customary precautions. When he heard that tell-tale click, he was prepared.

The room was dim with the light of only one lamp. His bed already contained the extra pillows arranged between the blankets to suggest that he was in bed and asleep. He was working in a chair out of sight from the window, and his second pistol was in full view on the night table beside the bed. The second gun would suggest to any casual peeper that Walter was in bed with his weapon handy.

The instant he heard the click, he left his chair and glided soundlessly into the shadow next to the window.

The intruder was definitely a professional. The visitor was inside the room before Walter really saw him enter. He was a small man, vaguely familiar, and there was an ugly .45 in his hand.

Even as he prepared to move, Walter frowned on the intruder's choice of weapon—too clumsy and noisy for decent work. And the visitor had made the unwarranted assumption that Walter was, indeed, in bed. The man was not quite professional enough.

Walter took a half step and struck his unwary guest on the back of the neck. The man dropped without a sound.

Immediately, Walter took his infra-red binoculars and scanned the fire escape and alley below his window. The caller would have a partner, of course, but his examination satisfied Walter that the alley was completely empty at the moment.

He turned and dragged his intruder into the light. What he saw explained the not-quite-good-enough performance. The man was Maxie Palermo himself. Palermo was a professional, but the hood was out of practice since he had become so important in the syndicate.

Walter was flattered. Palermo was one of Arista's chief aids. He felt even better when Palermo opened his eyes. There was a very satisfying fear in the man's eyes. It had probably been a long time since Palermo had looked into the wrong end of a gun.

"The entry was good," Walter said in his careful, but crisp way, like a teacher with a small boy, "but the rest was lousy. You're even wearing a belt. No good, has a buckle. You should tie your pants up with a rope. Sneakers are good, but next time take off those metal lace tips."

Palermo watched the muzzle of the small Beretta like a man watching a cobra about to strike. The small man's voice croaked

like a frog as he stared at the silencer on the muzzle.

"Go ahead, get it over!"

"Always enter a room facing any corner you can't see," Walter went on like a professor. "And that cannon is very bad for this work. Even a joint like this has a house dick. Think about your escape, see? Details, Palermo. Pay close attention to details. No loose ends, see?"

But by now Little Maxie Palermo had turned a fine shade of green, and did not seem to appreciate Walter's lecture on the trade.

"You're dead anyway, big man! You hear? Frank's the Man, the Boss! No one gets away from the Man!"

Walter sneered at this bravado. "Save your breath, punk," He said. "And tell Frank to be more careful who he sends. You've still got a lot to learn. You tell Frank."

"Get it over!" Palermo burst out. "Go on, shoot!"

Walter raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"You sure do have a lot to learn. Even a silenced shot might get your partner up here. It's Morgan Stein, of course. Frank would have to send both of you to watch each other. Stein'll be out front, and there'll be a man stashed away on the roof, right?"

"Wouldn't you like to know," Palermo snarled.

"As I said, I don't like loose ends," Walter said, "but in this case it doesn't matter. I have my way out, and I'll be long gone before it matters. Now, I want you to go back and tell Frank how dangerous this is for all of us. Tell him once more that if he'll leave me alone, I'll leave him alone. I'll leave the country, and he'll hear no more about me. You do that."

"You're not going—" The small gangster-leader stared incredulously, a faint glimmer of hope mixed with the fear in his eyes.

"I don't kill for nothing," Walter said, "you're not worth it. Let's say it's a gesture of good faith, next time I play rough. Tell Frank he's not smart enough to win against me."

"Why you—"

Walter stepped up and hit Palermo once with his blackjack. Palermo slumped and lay still. Walter

did not bother to look at Arista's lieutenant again. One blow was always enough for an expert like himself.

He holstered the Beretta, gathered his few things, and made certain that the hallway was clear. He noted with care that the elevator was on the main floor, and that the stairway door was still locked. He left his room and walked to the door.

He unlocked it with his special skeleton key, and left it obviously unlocked and slightly open. Then he went back down the hall to the room directly next to his old room. He unlocked this door with his special key, went inside, and locked the room door behind him. The room was, of course, his second room, taken by telephone under a false name.

Soon he heard Palermo come out of his old room. He listened as Palermo discovered the opened stairway door and ran down the stairs. Walter went to the window that overlooked the street in front from this room. He watched Palermo come running out and go across the street.

A second man materialized from the shadows. Through his infra-red binoculars, Walter studied the new man. Morgan Stein. Palermo and Stein seemed to be arguing. Then both of them turned and looked up toward the roof of the hotel. The third man on the roof could, obviously, tell them nothing. Palermo and Stein continued to argue. Walter Pettibone went to bed.

He remained locked in the room for another full day, and then he left for New York. The three killers would have gone in search of him by now, and he was tired of running. It was time to use his 'insurance.'

HIS OFFER OF peace to Frank Arista, of course, had been simply to lull the gang-boss into feeling safe in New York. Walter knew better than to think he could make a deal with Frank Arista while the boss thought he held the winning cards. This mistake, Walter planned to rectify. He walked in on The Fixer quietly.

The Fixer was not pleased to see him.

"Walter, I take this real bad," The Fixer said. "You know I never take sides, and Frank won't like it."

"It's business, I want negotiation. A direct contact would be a bit risky, right?"

"Frank is not feeling friendly toward you," The Fixer admitted. "Then this is business, not a friendly visit?"

"I want to make Frank understand I mean business," Walter said carefully. "It's important to him, too. I want you to tell him exactly why he must leave me alone. I have some very good 'insurance'."

"You mean you've got something on him?"

"I have."

"It better be good," The Fixer said. "I'm not sure I like this kind of deal."

"It's good," Walter said. "I'm careful and thorough. You know that, you taught me. For a long time I've known the need for 'insurance'."

"You don't trust people, Walter?"

"I can't afford to," Walter said. "Now, Frank always gave me my instructions in person, remember? He assumed it was to protect him, an error I made sure I did not point out. I carried a small tape recording machine each time. Frank's voice is nice and clear."

"And your voice, Walter?"

Walter Pettibone smiled. He placed a small tape machine on the desk, and drew three rolls of tape from his pocket. Soon the distinctive voice of Frank Arista filled the room. Arista had a fine, resonant voice complete with an accent and some very special and unique phrases.

"You'll notice Frank's habit of referring to himself by his own last name—a very stupid habit," Walter said.

The Fixer seemed paralyzed. Arista's booming voice named places, methods, motives, payoffs, and even the victim's names. There was more than enough to hang Frank Arista very high. But more important was what was *not* on the tapes. The Fixer looked at Walter with admiration as the tapes ended.

"You never said even a word yourself," The Fixer said. "Frank underestimated you."

"He trusted me," Walter said with a shrug. "A nod or two from me was enough for him to know I understood. He never noticed."

"He never used your name, not once," The Fixer said.

"I told him it was a good habit to have, not to mention my name. He forgot a few times, of course, but I threw those tapes away."

"Walter, that was a pretty smart idea. Where did you get it?"

"I thought it up myself," Walter said, smiling. "I had the recorder made specially and hidden in my hat. Frank never even wondered why I kept my hat on all the time."

"In your hat? Now that was clever," The Fixer said.

The Fixer took off his own hat and looked at it with definite admiration, as if trying to see how a recorder would fit nicely into it.

"Well," The Fixer said. "That should do for Frank. What do you want from him?"

"I want to be left alone, the dogs called off. I want to get out of the country, no one follows me. I want twenty-five grand in cash—small, used bills. That's cheap at the price. In return, I never come back, I keep quiet, I never use the tapes."

"He won't trust you."

"He's got no choice, has he?" Walter said. "Of course, I have some more tapes all prepared to go to the police in case I should have an 'accident'."

"You've covered everything. Right, Walter?"

"Correct," Walter said. "No loose ends. And by the way, friendship aside, I wouldn't want you to get any ideas about not remaining strictly neutral. You remember that first job of mine, the numbers runner? I took the precaution of keeping that pistol you loaned me. I think it still has your prints on it, and I'm sure it could be traced to you easily. There is no statute of limitations on murder, you know."

"So I'm aware," The Fixer said. "Well, you have been careful, haven't you? I don't suppose you had that tape-recorder in your hat in those days?"

"No, but the gun should do, just to keep you honest."

"The gun is very useful," The Fixer said. "How do you want it handled?"

"Contact Frank and tell him. Then get the money, and his agreement, and send the money to me. I'll tell you where later. When you have it all arranged, call me at this number. It's a public bar. I'll be surrounded by honest citizens."

"All right, Walter. That's the bar in your hotel?"

"It is. I'll be on a jet an hour after you call me, and none of us will have anything more to worry about."

Walter waited in The Fixer's office until he heard The Fixer begin to talk to Morgan Stein on the telephone. No one, not even The Fixer, called Frank Arista directly. The Fixer told it straight, and hung up to wait for Frank Arista to call back. Walter smiled, and left for his hotel.

WALTER PETTIBONE spent the next few hours shopping for the tropical clothes he needed for his new home. When he returned to his hotel, he packed and confirmed his ticket for the evening flight out. He was not, of course, flying direct to his ultimate destination. He took no chances even now.

Precisely one hour before his flight out, Walter packed his three tapes in his suitcase, closed the suitcase, and went down to the bar. He was not worried about the tapes; he had his others safely hidden.

He was enjoying his second ginger ale when The Fixer called. Frank Arista had agreed, if reluctantly and in a rage, to his terms. Walter instructed The Fixer to send the $25,000 to General Delivery, Havana, Cuba.

"I think Cuba will be safe for me just now," Walter said into the telephone. "Not that I'll pick it up myself. Your fee will be mailed to you, if that's all right."

"A pleasure, Walter. Have a good retirement."

"I plan to. Frank shouldn't have pushed me."

"Frank was stupid, I agree," The Fixer said.

After he hung up, Walter felt so elated that he had a third ginger ale. Then he hurried back up to his room to pick up his suitcase and go to the airport.

It was only from sheer habit that Walter approached the door of his hotel room silently. What he heard, and saw, made him stare in disbelief. There was a definite noise inside his room.

The small piece of scotch tape he always left stuck to the door and frame was now stuck only to the door. Someone was in his room! It was impossible to believe that Frank Arista could be that insane.

But Walter had learned to assume nothing. His silenced Beretta in his hand, he flung open the door, instantly scanned the space behind the door through the opening between door and frame, and stepped into the room, his shoulders held straight.

Little Maxie Palermo came up from behind Walter's now opened suitcase as if shot. In the next second that was exactly what Palermo was—shot. Little Maxie came up with his .45 blasting, but the unreliable big gun missed its first shot. There was no second shot from the .45. The Beretta shot

once, *pfffttt,* through the silencer, and Maxie Palermo was dead.

Behind him, Walter heard a faint noise in the hall. The big man whirled. There was no one in the doorway. He ran to the door. Down the hall the elevator was just closing. For an instant Walter had a clear view of Morgan Stein's face inside the elevator as the doors closed. Stein had clearly decided that flight was the wise course. Walter grimly agreed with Stein.

In his room again he began to move fast. The shots would bring company very soon. The elevator operator would certainly be running for the police already. It was obvious that Frank Arista had, in-

credibly, decided to gamble on getting the three tapes, and, somehow, neutralizing the remaining tapes before they reached the police. Perhaps Frank had a contact inside the police whom he trusted to stop the tapes in time.

Walter took a deep breath. This was no time to panic and overlook any details. He went to his suitcase and checked the tapes. One was missing!

Puzzled, Walter began to look for the missing tape. Why would Frank Arista want just one tape? He began to search the room very carefully. He did not need the tape, but his prints would be on it, and, more important, he did not understand why it was missing, and that made him very nervous. Walter had no intention of leaving any loose ends to trap him.

He found the tape in the corner of the room near the window. Obviously, Palermo had dropped it when he made his sudden and permanent departure from the world. Satisfied, and making one last check of the room, Walter put the three tapes into his pocket and left.

He went up to the roof, crossed to the next building, and went down to the street. Walter ignored the taxicabs. Frank Arista would not be idle now, and taxis could be traps. Walter took the subway. He rode quietly downtown like any good accountant.

He could, of course, have simply sent his other hidden tapes to the police, and made a run for it. But he was not going to leave the arrest of Frank Arista to chance. Walter intended to see that Frank Arista was out of the way before he made another move. A man as stupid as Frank could be dangerous.

When he walked into Homicide he asked for Captain Gazzo. As he had known, the Captain did not know him. Gazzo was reluctant to believe that this mild-looking man had the evidence to end the career of Frank Arista. But the Captain finally took the tapes and told Walter to wait.

Walter expected that once they heard the tapes the cops would suspect him of being in the syndicate, but it did not worry him. He was openly listed on Arista's books as an accountant, and that would explain how he came by the tapes. Arista would accuse him, naturally. But there would be no evidence against him, although he might be held as a material witness. That might even be best until it was all over.

The Captain returned at last. Gazzo seemed almost stunned by what he had heard. He stared down at Walter.

"You've sure cooked Arista," Gazzo said. "What did you say your name was?"

"Walter Pettibone. I'm employed by Mr. Arista as an accountant. It was only recently I found out what

his real business was," Walter said. His mild face looked very prim. "I was shocked, really shocked. I felt it my duty to make those tapes."

"Did you really?" Gazzo said. "Okay, take him."

Four policemen seemed to spring from nowhere. They had their hands on their guns. Walter blinked up at them.

"They can fry together," Captain Gazzo said.

MORGAN STEIN handed the tape to The Fixer. The two men were in The Fixer's office. The Fixer seemed sad.

"Poor Walter," The Fixer said. "You did a fine job, Stein. I really didn't like to sacrifice Frank, but he was a cooked goose anyway unless I let Walter get away. I couldn't do that, not after he threatened me. Walter should have known better. It's too bad he got ambitious."

"Frank was a jerk," Morgan Stein said. "Lettin' Walter get those tapes on him."

"Frank was a disappointment," The Fixer agreed. "I thought he was better than that."

"This makes me the boss, right?" Stein said.

"Especially with Little Maxie gone," The Fixer said.

Morgan Stein laughed. "That was easy. He tossed that tape of Walter's out the window to me, and planted the tape you gave me, just like I told him to. The stupid jerk really thought we were double-crossing Arista and taking over Walter's blackmail scheme.

"I'd like to have seen his face when I didn't give him the signal and Walter walked in on him. I guess I really killed Maxie at that. The punk had it coming, I never liked him."

"You did fine, Morgan," The Fixer said.

The Fixer leaned back in his chair behind the desk and considered that all-in-all it had worked fine. It had been simple to convince Stein and Palermo to double-cross Arista, and just as simple to convince Stein to double-cross Palermo. They were such ambitious and greedy men. Just like poor Walter.

"You know," Morgan Stein said, "what I don't get is how you figured Walter would pick up the tape you had Maxie plant. I mean, he didn't need it to finish Frank."

"Details, Morgan," The Fixer said, and laughed. "Walter hated loose ends. He could no more have left that tape missing than he could have given up a dime of his money. That tape would have worried him until he found it. Poor Walter."

The Fixer was still laughing after Morgan Stein had gone. All-in-all a very good job. Arista had failed, he would not be missed. Walter had been getting too ambitious. Little Maxie Palermo had done nothing wrong, but Palermo had to die to make Walter think

Arista had really been after the tapes.

The Fixer opened the false bottom of his wastebasket and took the spool of tape from the hidden recording machine. He played it back, and listened to the voice of Morgan Stein explaining all about the killing of Palermo. Stein never used The Fixer's name, and The Fixer's voice was nowhere on the tape. The Fixer had controlled that with a foot pedal under his desk.

Now The Fixer held the new tape and sighed wearily. Sometimes it seemed more trouble to remain hidden than to come out into the open as the Boss that he was. Perhaps he should just turn Stein in right now and run the syndicate in the open. The Fixer was getting tired of second-raters and over-ambitious killers. Still, it was safer to just sit back and pull the strings. That was the best insurance of all. Poor Walter.

IN HIS CELL Walter Pettibone was still shouting his protest long after they had played the tape for him. It was one of the three tapes he had brought. But it was not one of his tapes.

In horror Walter listened to his own voice explaining in detail how he had killed that numbers runner fifteen years ago. His name, his voice, the details, and no other voice. It was the report he had made to his friend The Fixer so long ago. And it was all clear now.

The Fixer believed in 'insurance' too. All these years Walter had been so careful, so clever, and he had never even known who he was really working for. The Fixer. There was no point in telling the police about his carefully-saved .38 caliber pistol. It would, of course, be registered in Walter's own name. The Fixer was a really careful man. He never allowed a single loose end to dangle.

Walter Pettibone stopped shouting then, and turned his mild face to the wall of the cell. He never spoke again, not even months later when they strapped him into the electric chair the day after Frank Arista.

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MURDER IN THE LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE

There may be many things a big wheel in the film colony may want to forget . . . when an aura of dark violence hovers over his past—

by TOM H. MORIARTY

THE STAGE SETS in the big barns, the company streets, and the tables and counters in the studio commissary were more alive and colorful than usual on that fall day.

A posse of real cattle punchers was down from El Tejon ranch to do authentic ride-aways and provide cow town atmosphere. Four Southern belles were gowned in a mighty southern way. Polynesian men and women browned up things in graceful half-nakedness. A river gambler looked as if he was about to palm a card from his laced cuff. A Negro soldier, who had been two years old when World War II ended, was a handsome article in his O.D. blouse with two rows of lettuce. These and more citizens of the Land of Make Believe buttered their English muffins and drank their coffee and talked about the doings of their benefactors, Penta-Globe Pictures.

I could not have asked for a better day to guest my father's long-time friend Charlie Verdier. Charlie was in town on a vacation from his job as a plainclothesman on the San Francisco police force. He and Dad were buddies from

way back and I myself. Frank Murphy's youngest son Eddie, remembered Charlie's blue-uniformed visits to our flat on Potrero Hill.

Right now, however, you would think Charlie was a brokerage house resident-partner in his expensively quiet clothes. He pulled the hotel beat in San Francisco and was completely at home circulating among dignitaries and exec-

utive brass in the lobbys and bars of the Fairmont and St. Francis hotels.

"This would be a tough spot for me to work," Verdier said.

"You're supposed to be on a vacation," I said.

Charlie Verdier shrugged, undisturbed by the accusation in my voice. "Your Dad was the same way, Eddie," he said. "He was always working, wherever he went. Once we kidded him about casing a bankers convention for an embezzler on the lam."

Later on I steered Charlie over to a set where one of our top drawers, luscious Maylian Maidan, was slinking down a mountain path with a Daniel Boone rifle in her hands. The sun bonnet was tilted back on her head to give the lights a chance to catch the sheen and the configuration of that golden tangle of hair.

The bulk and height of Maro Ravan, chief executive officer at Penta-Globe, interposed between the flood-lit set and our vantage point in the rear. Mr. Ravan was one of five big wheels who formed the Penta part of the deal when the combine bought up Globe Pictures and started back the glory road with the addition of television serials to its withering movie production.

In the year that I had been a P-G flack, I was in his office only once. He had instructed my boss, Harry Lesher, director of publicity-promotion, to send me over. He looked up briefly from his stack of papers and asked, "Are you the guy who came up with 'Teen-Agers—Write-Your-Congressman'?" When I nodded he shook his head, as if he thought there was a button missing somewhere in my makeup. But all he said was, "Keep it up." That concluded my audience with the big man.

Unexpected drop-ins on working sets marked Maro Ravan's method. He never said anything. He just looked on for a time and departed. Everyone knew that he wanted it that way. They knew that he was not bugging anybody, nor throwing his weight around, nor waiting for affable conversation. He was just keeping silent tabs.

Maylian Maidan successfully found her way down the mountain path in the fourth take. Mr. Ravan passed by us closely at a slow pace. He was lost in his private thoughts, with his eyes on a far horizon.

"That's the boss man," I said to Charlie. "Maro Ravan. Showman since the days he ushered in a flea palace. He's adjusted better than others to television."

Verdier said nothing then. But that evening at L.A. International, waiting for the boarding call on his San Francisco flight, he asked, "How old would Ravan be? About fifty-four—five? He must be six

two, and weight two forty. Where's he from did you say?"

"Don't tell me you've got him connected up with your private portrait gallery," I said. "The man's strictly business—side show biz. He started as an agent with hard-up night club acts that were trying to break in to films. He saved a chunk for Globe by personally giving the bum's rush to a certain imported director who thought he was God. He worked his way up quietly. No fireworks. No self-appointed genius. Officially, he is fifty-four. No one ever listed where he was born."

"He's from San Francisco," said Verdier. "His name is Mario Ravanessi. He was picked up in a hi-jack caper at Halfmoon Bay. That was a long, long time ago, in the late twenties, to be exact. The booze used to be landed from Canada and the Coast Guard chased the rum runners. We were after the hi-jackers who took it away from the runners."

There was no hatred in Charlie Verdier's surprising speech. No dramatics. He just seemed sure of what he said. He had a memory that made you wonder if it didn't go all the way back to Plymouth Rock.

"You can't go off on the deep end after seeing a man briefly that way," I replied. "Think how anybody could change. Just being reasonable doesn't take too much of an effort. Why not try?"

"The records were stashed away years ago in the D.A.'s office," he said. "But they did keep an updated photo or two—the kind they get as a newspaper clipping or in a magazine. There's no charge against him or he would have been picked up. I just told you this about Ravanessi because it might be a good thing for you to know."

Dad's old friend was undoubtedly back home and in his bed long before I stopped thinking about what he had said. Could Charlie Verdier's declaration real-

ly be accurate, I wondered. Charlie was nudging sixty, and ready for retirement. The mist of years could well be fogging up his photographic mind.

I came to the conclusion that Verdier's brief encounter with the Land of Make Believe had affected him with the odd magic that exhilarates so many people who get behind the scenes for the first time. They see these architects of dreams in the flesh, and the close-range contact is an amazing mental hypodermic. They curiously associate themselves with the improbable imaginings of this new world where people are different, where fantasy is truth and truth is fantastic. They have been made different by some indescribable flip-flop of values in their minds.

You may have guessed by now that my long suit at the studio was in the promotions end of the publicity department, and you would have been one hundred percent correct. I had operated a one-man band in publicity and sales promotion in San Francisco, filling in time until I could hook up with a newspaper again.

Harry Lesher of Penta-Globe came to town and showcased some new actors at my old haunt, The Press and Union League Club. I assisted Harry in previewing a picture in the city, and he invited me to join his staff down in Smogville. By now I was so mired in past-due accounts to L.A. department stores, and the credit-card people that I had a long studio servitude facing me before I would overtake my conscience.

ON THE MORNING after learning that I might be working for an exhi-jacker from ancient prohibition days, boss man Harry Lesher called the second of a series of meetings on the subject of Mr. Ravan's latest project. This time Harry remained in the genius room with the flacks and the promoters, to be certain that everybody would act bright and cooperative.

"Mr. Ravan wants the world to know that Penta-Globe is the Industry's leader for decency in pictures and TV," Lesher said. "Stop and think what decency means to one hundred and eighty-five million Americans. It means a movie that the whole family can see together. It means—"

Our best magazine publicity planter interrupted, saying, "They won't buy that jazz, Harry. Take Johnny Moon. He's got a few fan mags. He wants Maylian in a bikini and the picture is 'Kentucky Frontier'."

Lesher waved him down. "We're not concerned with current production. This is a long range project. We want a spectacular kickoff now. Then we follow up with something good later. We set off a chain reaction. It adds up to identifying P-G with decency. Decency is our salvation—yours and mine."

He paused for a long time and nobody said a word. They knew that Harry Lesher was on the spot or he would not plead and wait. Meanwhile the local papers and a flock of stray correspondents from the army of resident reviewers for outside papers and magazines, were keeping our switchboard lit up. Harry would not give in. He waited, ordering Danish and coffee to keep the gang cooped up until they gave.

I had been snooping around the back lot a week ago and had learned that the construction men were clearing off a space to accommodate storage for a special Lincoln cabin set that was no longer needed and had been struck.

The set itself was a dandy—a real permanent-type house of natural wood logs, not the usual one-faced fake front. It had a fence of cross-hatched rails which had been split by an axe. It took you back to the history-book account of Honest Abe reading by the fire's light. The idea flashed. I started talking at once and framed the project as I went along.

". . . our requirements are there . . . a symbol of solid, homey things . . . and a bonafide news event. When Mr. Ravan dedicates the Lincoln cabin as a studio library for research, scripts, artifacts, his theme will be—"

"Decency," someone broke in. "What else but, man? *Decency.*"

"A press party in the Lincoln Cabin. Souvenir Lincoln pennies as big as a dollar."

In accordance with an old Hollywood custom, invoked to punish people who were crazy enough to have ideas, the whole ball of wax was now tossed in my lap to work up to a fine point of detail. My friends ran away to catch up with their daily chores.

SEVERAL DAYS later, Harry Lesher stopped by in my miniature work cabana. He dropped my precious plan book on the table that I used for a desk.

"Mr. Ravan went for it," he said. "A few changes. He will be quoted in the news release, but that new Golden Boy will read it. For better diction and also to introduce the gent to the press. I told the boss this was your basic."

"What did he have to say?"

"Nothing. Does he ever say anything?"

So-called news travels fast in the grease paint country. Johnny Moon dropped in on me in the midst of my operational labors.

"How's the demon Frisco press agent?" was his smiling insult.

Moon usually called publicity men press agents in public because he knew that most of them secretly hated the term. Press agent had a barnyard aroma to it on account of the misdeeds of fast-buck artists through the years. It was in a way like calling a creative con man a racketeer.

I had been a clock-punching general assignment newspaper reporter on the old *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* before being merged out of a job in 1959, and I knew several so-called press agents who were better newspapermen than this grinning chipmunk Johnny Moon. Moon had been around Hollywood a life-time. Today's young flacks were afraid of him.

They knew that he had the power to put a freeze on their art and copy handouts and shut them out of a fair-sized group of medium-sized and small papers, including one good big fishwrapper right in their own Los Angeles County backyard. He had a fan magazine or two which also took his stuff regularly. It was bad news when you were hurting for ink and got shut out.

I looked the grinning old devil in the eyes and thought how much he suggested a spry, grey chipmunk with his outboard oval of prominent, whitewash-white teeth.

"You know what I'm working on, Johnny," I said, "or you wouldn't bother to look me up. I'm flattered, pal, that the dean of movie correspondents should care. On second thoughts, will you give me a break and wait until the details are worked out?"

"Maro is in a hurry to take the veil," Moon said. "What's the story behind the story, as we say?"

"It never occurred to me that there was one, old buddy," I told him. "You might find it if you read your own fan magazines and learn about the national movement against filth in films and violence in TV serials. Penta-Globe has never stooped to trash. I should be telling you, Johnny, but it's a fact that since Globe became P-G the studio has never made a horror killing picture, or a sex-pots-on-parade, or a blue-joke comedy."

This staunch defense of alma mater had no outward effect whatsoever in changing Moon's balcony smile. "I'm going to break a version of it, anyway," he said. "The story's mine, so don't feed the downtowns ahead of me."

I checked with Harry Lesher on the situation where a leak could possibly make other correspondents and newsmen sore. Lesher laughed it off.

"All he could do is write about a rumor. We are pretty good at denying hearsay. He hasn't anything to go on yet. You're the one who's firming up times and places. Mr. Ravan doesn't know himself when he performs."

I STAYED ON late, that evening, to wind up the work and make our check list of assignments and schedule of things to be done on the complicated program. Harry Lesher was on the job too, awaiting an appointment with Maro Ravan. When Harry returned a half hour or so later from the Ravan office, his face told of discontent.

"I hope Johnny Moon didn't get his copy in on time," he said with a wry smile, "because there ain't gonna be no dedication of Lincoln's cabin. Ain't gonna be no halo of decency riveted on to Maro Ravan's collar. Ain't gonna be no press party."

"No."

"Yes. The whole shebang is cancelled as of now by the gentleman playing the title role," Harry informed me.

It was out of the question to ask why. Mr. Ravan was not in the habit of giving reasons for his decisions.

At first I enjoyed a quiet smile in thinking of Johnny Moon. He might have filed his copy. If so, he would have to say embarrassing things to papers on his list. Then I thought of my own days as a newshawk in legitimate San Francisco, and of the compounded troubles that come with a bum steer on a beat. For the honor of the profession I decided to reach Johnny Moon. Perhaps he could kill his copy before it was too late.

The night desk of his biggest paper in the county kept track of Moon, for the simple reason that some Hollywood people were live news and the desk occasionally had to check on background facts when a 'personality' got himself into a scrape with John Law. By special cooperation, I was given Moon's home address, which was an apartment-hotel a few blocks

north of Hollywood Boulevard and near Cahuenga.

I tried to reach him there on the phone, but was told he was out. So I knocked off a message to him on my typewriter, hopped in my little imported bug, and drove

out to the apartment with the intention of leaving the note.

"If this is urgent," the man on the desk and switchboard said, "I can read it to him when he phones in. He seldom comes around here much any more."

"I wonder if he has a forwarding address," I said, becoming alert at once at the information. "I could call messenger service and get a boy to deliver it."

"Sure. Why not? You call 'em here." He shoved out a phone. "You understand I can't give you Mr. Moon's address. It's confidential, like everything else these days. Unlisted phones. Private hide-outs. What good does it do people?"

I waited for the messenger service boy to arrive and paid him two dollars even, or more than the going price. I walked out the door and halted to one side in a shadow. When the boy came out I asked him to let me check the envelope to make sure it read *Urgent*. It did.

It also had written on it an address on Outpost Drive and I fixed the numbers in my head. Knowing this hill-view area to be high-hat exclusive, I was curious now to the point of doing a little private-eye bird-dogging.

Winding up Outpost Drive into the hills above Sunset Strip and Hollywood, I found myself becoming deeply interested in Johnny Moon. The homes were mostly ultramodern ranch types and fairly big, with expensive landscape gardening. The house that was Moon's forwarding address was a gem of beauty, undoubtedly in the $60,000 to $75,000 bracket.

He certainly could not have bought that one, if indeed he owned it, on what a Hollywood correspondent could make. Only the top correspondents made a fair living; the rest worked for the barest peanuts in order to go to previews free and look important.

As I drove around and back down to pass the place for another look, the messenger service motorcycle was parked in front. The door was open and Moon's toothy face was unmistakable as a man took the message.

Moon had put in years on the Hollywood beat, dating back to the silent film era when sets were lavish and outdoors; when sweat-hot barracks buildings and pepper trees and orange groves marked the budding movie industry at Sunset and Vine.

Now he was sitting before a picture window and looking down from the heights to the sparkling carpet of the neon plain and the geometric ridges of commercial buildings in a film-less Hollywood immediately below. His position in the movie-TV colony was as secure as it could be in a basically insecure field. He had long ago discovered the art of changing with change and of keeping things and money coming in.

Moon had prepped on big downtown papers. Then he had lost out or been merged out when papers folded or consolidated, and had drifted to new fields as an independent correspondent. Now tie-ins and promotional cut-ins as well as straight reporting furnished his income.

One year in Hollywood's heyday, Moon went on Christmas studio calls in a chartered taxicab, to have room and safe custody for the cases of booze and the gift packages acquired along the way.

Many a puffed-up, self-styled public relationist in a studio was in point of fact a glorified errand boy for gifts, a go-between for people in high places. Nor was there any particular stain of wrong-doing or shoddy practice attached to the duties, for the gift game had been played for so many decades that it had been raised to the legitimacy of standard, expected conduct. Hollywood had shaped Johnny Moon; made him strong in his own way.

In addition, over newcomers Moon possessed a unique advantage. He knew accurately where the bodies were buried. He had worked on the fringe of the lives of men and women who were murdered, committed suicide, became alcoholics, descended to the status of drug addicts, joined dangerous isms for the publicity of it, or otherwise made garish shows of their lives. He had more information and speculations stored away than he ever dared submit for print.

I heard from Johnny Moon the next day. He said on the phone, "Thanks for the tip-off. You're getting to be the third smartest press agent I know."

So I had made a friend as well as cased a potential enemy. Suddenly Hollywood was becoming too simplified. Something was bound to be wrong, I thought, and show up soon.

Nonetheless, the smooth way of life got smoother instead of rougher. Mr. Ravan sent word by his secretary that he wanted me to come to his home in the frontier tract above Beverly Hills that evening. I told Harry Lesher and he was surprised to the point of bafflement.

"You've scored, Eddie," he said. "Maybe we're going to lose you to Production or Management. Well, if so, you'll be happier, kid. You never did get to think and act like a press agent. You are still a newspaperman at heart."

I DROVE UP through the canyon twists of the Santa Monica mountains that evening, over humps marking the crests of ridge run-offs that started down in opposite directions, to the San Fernando Valley and to the Pacific Ocean and Malibu. The location was a lonely throne high on the mountain's saddle. An electronically-controlled gate to the estate opened up after

I phoned from the gatehouse box. A parking bay showed eight cars and a repair truck in line at the north flank of the big Mediterranean pile now known as *Ravan Retreat.*

Maro Ravan was in his basement trophy room, which stretched as long as a bowling alley and was packed with souvenirs of studio achievement. He was more or less superintending the installation of an antenna inlet for an out-size color TV set that was being unpacked.

"I've liked your ideas," he said, as we sat in front of a manor-sized fireplace in the middle of a wall's length. "I want you to come up with something on a matter that's important to me and to the studio. I know what I could do in this situation, but I want some outside thinking and you're elected."

Ravan had already spoken more words than I ever heard him use in my stay at P-G, yet that was only a beginning. He went on to outline a top level situation, which, in its unwinding, explained the reason for calling off the Decency build-up plan.

Of the five executives who combined to buy the old Globe set-up and christen it Penta-Globe, one was in Europe permanently, handling overseas movie production, he related. Another was head of a large building and loan association in Los Angeles, and not publicly identified with the studio. The other two were owner-directors of Talent Affiliates Corporation which owned the contracts, rights, and properties of a fat list of prominent actors, actresses, authors, and associated talents and arts production facilities.

"The T.A.C. holdings in Penta-Globe cause my problem," Ravan went on, when we'd digested all of the above. "A convict named 'Caruso' McGuire is about to be let out of Joliet prison for gangster activities that took place many years ago. T.A.C. has bought rights to McGuire's life story and they want me to buy it for P-G and make a picture.

"That I won't do. I wasn't kidding you fellows about decency in films. Chicago-type gangster pictures went out years ago. It was a fad, at best. A sign of times that have changed. TV today is running imitation violence and tinsel gunplay and it's affecting a lot of kids. Why should movies revive the way things were when gangsters almost ran Chicago? I don't believe in it."

If old Charlie Verdier were by chance right, then Mario Ravanessi had certainly got religion since he was a teen-ager. Sitting there completely attentive, I felt good about the trust that Mr. Ravan was putting in me. I studied him for some mark, or healed-up proud-flesh, or conformation of nose or ears, which might have rung a bell of recognition in the

trained observation of Verdier. The nearest I came to a clue was a slash line on his neck which did not blend in with his dark olive skin.

"What would you do? That's what I want to hear tomorrow," he said, ending the meeting.

Then he called over to the workmen at the end of the cavernous room. "Hey, fellows. How about a beer before you go?"

The technicians were pleased and not embarrassed in the least. It turned out that they were on the studio payroll and had been fixing up a few things for the boss from time to time.

They sat in with us like it was a regular thing and exchanged pleasantries. The TV expert was Jake Foss and his electrician helper was Tony Valla. They were men in their fifties, old-timers like their boss.

I found a letter waiting at my lanai apartment in Westwood that night. It came from Dad and was a scribbled note, saying, "You may be interested in the enclosed. I helped the reporter with some facts on this. They still know where to find me around the papers. Charlie Verdier sends regards too. Dad."

Enclosed was a tear page of the *San Francisco Times-News* which featured several old photos of San Francisco rum runners, hi-jackers, and some notorious Chicago hoods, including Caruso McGuire.

The Big Roust was the headline on the story. It told of the day a squadron of police touring cars—those old Buicks with the cloth tops and isinglass windows—had escorted a Cadillac limousine jammed with hot characters, down Bayshore Highway and out of town.

The news hook on the feature story was a despatch from Chicago to the effect that Caruso McGuire, an almost forgotten convicted mobster who began his crime career in San Francisco, was to be released this week from Joliet. Caruso, named by his world for a readiness to sing with informational arias damaging to friends, had been in the Cad when motorcycle sirens cleared the way and the flanking police cars aimed machine gun barrels out of the flaps in the canvas tops.

There was nothing in the name-studded yarn about a Mario Ravanessi. I wondered for a time in IM had Dad and Charlie Verdier to thank for that omission. Then I dismissed the speculation, for those two old-fashioned bloodhounds were not ones to compromise with crime for any reason under the

sun. They were rich men in things other than money.

The task of being a double-dome for Mr. Ravan did not turn out so difficult. I reasoned that there were only a few things he could do. He could stand firm and refuse to buy the story for his own reasons and no one could criticize him due to his stature in the industry. Or he could buy the story and produce it as a B picture in watered down form, or as a novelty TV half-hour show of semi-documentary type. Or he could buy the story and not produce it. The public would quickly forget that it was ever a potential film or TV feature.

The fact that he called me, a greenhorn in administrative matters at the top level, into the problem made me feel that he was not in a position to refuse to purchase the rights. The fact that Caruso McGuire had learned of Ravanessi's whereabouts had to be recognized. If the singer had, then he could be expected to hold a psychological gun at Ravan's back.

I settled on this recommendation to him: buy the story and produce a script with no dramatics or glorification, but only with the theme of 'Death is the wages of sin.' Here would be unfolded the realistic picture of gangster cowardice, rottenness, ignorance, double dealing, manhunts, and jail hardships. The nation would be invited to see an object lesson in unattractive crooks and crime.

"You may have something," he said.

That was all he said. He was again the uncommunicative man.

That afternoon he sent his secretary with orders for me to be at his Palm Springs home that coming Saturday. My job there would be to monitor any wandering press men who happened to drop by—to monitor them out, that is, and away from the big house. He was having a confidential meeting with three men—the secretary emphasized "three", as she may have been told to do—from T.A.C. I suspected at once that the third man would probably be Caruso McGuire himself. It seemed to be in the make-up of Ravan to face emergencies head on.

An ad agency man who liked to describe himself as the head of studio relations had been bugging me for months to borrow one of his national client's 'courtesy cars', in order to get some visibility for the product around the studio. His real purpose, of course, was to work up to an agreement with the studio whereby a fleet of the new models would be turned over for free to us for use in pictures. I stepped up to this opportunity now that I could use an air-conditioned car on the desert, and told him to send one over.

ON SATURDAY morning I wheeled into the walled compound of Ravan South, as Mr. Ravan

called the huge ranch house in a little canyon niche at the base of Mt. San Jacinto. Among the cars there was a duplicate, except for color, of the new Woodward I was driving.

It had a press sign stuck on the windshield and Johnny Moon's name scribbled on it. I looked at the owner certificate on the steering wheel and saw that this was not actually Johnny Moon's car. The legal owner was the Woodward west coast office. I had a fair guess as to had loaned it to Moon.

Mr. Ravan's meeting had already started. He and the T.A.C. people were incommunicado in a wing of the motel-like ranch home, separated by lawn and gardens from an Olympic-sized pool.

At the distance I recognized Johnny Moon, who sat in a deck chair and talked to several of our talent Names, including the long-stemmed Maylian Maidan in a sculptured swim suit of black that looked as if it was painted on.

"Didn't you see the sign?" Moon called as I came up to the people. "No dogs or press agents allowed."

I returned the serve. "That bars both of us," I said.

If Johnny did not care for the splatter of laughs from the audience, he did not show it. His face bore the usual wide, etched grin of a cartoon beaver.

"What's the scoop?" he asked. "Maro doesn't invite press agents here for nothing."

"I don't know myself yet," I lied.

"He's closeted with Gus Mannstein."

"They must be cooking up something for Maylian," I said.

"To counteract that stinkeroo she's finishing up."

I wanted to play dumb and my question to Maylian worked. "What did Maro say to you when he told you to come down here today?" I asked.

"I never talk to Mr. Ravan," she said. "Who does? Gus Mannstein invited me to drive down with him."

Johnny Moon had enough for a line or two of copy now and he had more or less checked it out at the source. I doubt if he knew for sure that Mr. Mannstein was on the premises, but had just been fishing for corroboration. He left in a little while, after commanding me to give him a memo of facts the next day, in time for his Monday copy.

Two other movie correspondents phoned in from their motels outside of Palm Springs and I handled the calls. They had no suspicions to check out, but were merely trying to learn if Mr. Ravan was at the Springs.

After this mild interest in the boss, I camped inside the house where I had a view of the entrance to Ravan South and could spot snoopers before they saw me, and monitor them out.

In the early afternoon, a man

whom I recognized as Gus Mannstein came through the lobby in this great flat house. He was accompanied by two other men and one of these was Caruso McGuire. I pegged the ex-convict at once from the picture in the newspaper feature from San Francisco.

Caruso did not look happy.

Almost thirty years in stir had taken much of the insolence out of his once-challenging face. There was a fish-flat, stare-ahead look to him that was postery in its motionless vacancy. His hair was pepper-and-salt grey, and the hue of his bleached skin marked a man whose naturally ruddy complexion had faded lighter from lack of warm sunshine in the outdoors. But he still appeared rugged and powerful in the bag-fitting suit he wore.

He made his way awkwardly through the furniture of the room. His eyes took in the richness of decorations, paintings, and flower planters and he seemed a bit bewildered at the sight.

"How do you do, Mr. Mannstein," I said and got in return a half-way lift of the hand as the men continued on out.

The T.A.C. man figured me for just another Hollywood aspirant who had probably met him when the representation contract was signed. Mannheim showed that he had no time for insignificant small talents that waited their turn in ante rooms.

Mr. Ravan sent for me after a while. The secretary guided me to a court faced directly on a private cactus garden. On the gravel path Mr. Ravan walked up and down, with a deep scowl on his face. I supposed that I was sufficiently familiar to him by this time. He did not have to bother to wear his calm manner of control and command.

"I refused to buy it," he said after a silent wait of time. "I don't understand Gus Mannstein. He's brother-close to this con. McGuire is making the deal, not T.A.C. McGuire starts to tell me what to do. Star Maidan in it, he says, and some young crum he's brought along from Chicago. Some night club character."

Ravan sat down.

"I haven't heard the end of this," he eventually said. "They have me marked for their pigeon. They won't listen to me. They'll be back. I want you to keep thinking. It may get rough."

I told him about Johnny Moon's snooping, but he was not concerned a bit.

"Tell Moon anything," he said. "Tell him Mannstein and I are lining up a special for Maylian. A career woman story." Then he smiled the smallest bit and was the executive again.

THERE WAS A message to call Johnny Moon when I arrived back in L.A. on Sunday evening.

Moon told me what I should have had sense enough to learn by myself from the car radio. Tony Valla of Penta-Globe Pictures had been found dead in a driveway in the Wilton-Yucca area. The body of the studio grips showed the bruises and blood of a cruel beating. Death could have come from heart strain in the exhaustion of a stuggle to save himself from brass knuckles or pistol whipping. Police were trying to locate the antagonist or antagonists in a possible grudge fight.

Moon wanted the names of some of Valla's friends at the studio, so he could round up human interest reactions to the loss of a pal. I believed, too, that he wanted to track down any story that might be within a story, to add to his collection which included most every headline case that ever broke in Hollywood. He was the local crime expert, all right, by virtue of his personal coverage of the L.A. scene over the years.

I contacted Harry Lesher, who took it from there and later released a statement from Maro Ravan, offering a reward of one thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest of Valla's assailant. A thousand dollar reward meant page-one publicity.

I went to Tony Valla's funeral two days later, not only because I worked for the studio but because I had met the deceased and had liked him. I was not exactly surprised to see Mr. Ravan there. The friendliness of the boss to Valla at *Ravan Retreat* called for the gesture, despite the fact that Mr. Ravan was too busy a man to attend funerals of people from the studio unless a Name was involved. It was perfect public relations for P-G when the downtown photogs shot the No. 1 man, looking downcast and grim, with a mourning group of union studio workers.

Valla's death was not quickly forgotten around P-G. The guard detail was overhauled and reinforced. The man's friends organized a collection for Valla's wife and two grown children.

In Maro Ravan the seemingly minor tragedy brought out a new shade of personality that few had observed before. You know how it is said that iron enters a man's soul. This was the effect that showed up overnight in Mr. Ravan. I was mildly shocked when he called me to his office and I saw him standing behind his desk, deep in a smolder of thought.

"This bum Johnny Moon is in my hair," he said harshly. "Go see what he wants. I refuse to talk to him."

I TRACKED DOWN Moon on the phone and arranged to meet him at his apartment hotel off the Boulevard, the home he used as a front. I found him relaxing with a bottle of vodka and a carton of orange juice, in a drab little place. Dust was layered on table and TV

top. The air was dead, as if the window had not been opened in weeks.

"I wanted to talk to Maro, not you," Moon said. "If Maro wants it this way, I guess there's nothing else to do at this point. I assume you know about Caruso McGuire?"

"I've found out about him since I saw you at the Springs."

"Be that as it may. Now I'm going to tell you something off the cuff and you can help me. I'm doing a little public relations work for McGuire on the side."

"What has that got to do with Penta-Globe?"

"Just this. You're going to hear McGuire's story. Then you're going to take it back to Maro Ravan."

"So that's what I'm going to do."

"It is, Eddie. It's exactly what you are going to do. Ravan won't see McGuire again. Gus Mannstein can do nothing to intercede. Ravan acts like he wants a showdown. Tell him he's going to get it if he wants it that way."

By this time I judged that Johnny Moon had some of the facts, so I had no hesitation about asking a few questions myself.

"If Mr. Ravan doesn't want to tie-in with a gangster's life story, what makes you think he has to? There are a few other studios around these parts that would jump at the chance to bid for the material."

"I agree," he said, "but McGuire doesn't. McGuire wants to peddle to one man."

"And that one man won't play ball. So that's the end of it."

"Not quite, Eddie. I have two stories I'm sitting on. The biggest since the old days when people killed each other and the cops didn't know where to start looking." He paused for dramatic effect and then continued," One story is evidence that Maylian Maidan is McGuire's daughter. And—get this—Ravan's niece. The other story is that Ravan and McGuire were, let's say, business associates a long time ago. I think that more or less explains why McGuire wants to do business with P-G and not with anybody else."

"I've never heard anything like that in my life," I said. "If it's true, why don't you break the stories?"

I said this because I believed that he was bluffing. I knew that a real newspaperman handles important information differently. If he works for a big paper, he talks it over confidentially with his City Editor. Maybe the story never breaks because it cannot be nailed down for truth. The libel courts are the most feared institutions in any publisher's life.

Moon was evidently eager to draw down a fat fee from McGuire, and the prime condition attached to McGuire's assignment was to bring about a meeting with Maro Ravan. Moon had probably extracted enough fragments of infor-

mation out of a still cozy McGuire to concoct his own scare story.

There were things that I could do to pull the rug out from under this grinning chipmunk. While he was talking I considered the wisdom of bringing about an immediate showdown and thus avoiding the possibility of blackmail.

I could ask Ravan to summon Maylian Maidan to his office and have her deny the accusation and name as liars and persecutors McGuire and his agent, Moon. Maro Ravan's place in Hollywood would guarantee him a vote of confidence from the public.

"While you were at it," I said, "you didn't mention Tony Valla's place in this."

The remark was a quick-draw shot in the dark. Moon closed his mouth in astonishment, an eclipse of teeth. Now he was certainly thinking hard about Valla's connection, and beginning to get wrought up a bit. If McGuire had been a first, second, or third-hand cause of Valla's death, then Johnny Moon must know that he was playing around with real trouble—the kind of trouble that used to put box-car type on front pages.

Any so-called public relations fee would have to be mighty large to underwrite the awesome risk involved.

"What do you mean Valla?" he said at last and weakly.

"I thought you knew Valla was a long-time personal friend of Mr.

Ravan's," I said. "He may have been just another guy around the studio, an unknown grips, but he was on first-name terms with Maro—and that's more than Harry Lesher can say for himself."

This statement about first-names was, of course, a lie, but I felt that a little touching-up was in order regarding the friendship between boss and hired hands.

Moon changed the subject fast. "I can expect to hear from you, then?" he said. He was not telling me things now. He was asking.

"I'll see what gives," I promised. "And don't blame me if nothing happens and McGuire takes you for an old-fashioned ride up Mulholland Drive. You shouldn't fool around with those kind of clients."

Moon decided to leave with me, when I got up to go. My hunch was that shrewd old Johnny would much rather be up there on the hill, sitting by the picture window,

cut off from the world, than trembling alone in this hot, dreary room, waiting for the door to open and for McGuire to walk in for his report. After all, this apartment dump was fairly close to the Wilton-Yucca area.

If Moon's nerves had the jumps, mine were surely heading in the same direction as I contemplated repeating what had been claimed about Ravan's past. There was no calming influence, either, in the fact that the day was fiercely gusty with the first blow of grit-laden, ovenish wind from the south and the desert. This irritating wind was known to Southern Californians as 'the Santa Ana.'

On my way out to the studio, raucous sirens moved automobile traffic to the right to stop, while fire-fighting equipment rushed screamingly by. Sirens from the general direction of Santa Monica sounded faintly in the distance. Three-alarmers. I mention this because the scene seemed to fit my own feelings so perfectly, alive with tension and threatening danger.

Mr. Ravan's office was closed for the day. He had rounded up some studio worthies and gone to his Santa Monica Mountains mansion to double check the fire prevention equipment so vital to homes set in the far-removed crowns of land that commanded canyon slopes.

I would judge that he had about a quarter of a million dollars tied up in house, courts, gardens, pool, and personal effects in Ravan Retreat. It was actually a landmark of Hollywood nobility, now in its third ownership, and had been fireproofed in every aspect according to recommendations of firms that wrote the insurance.

The boss's absence at the studio did not make me downcast. In the back of my mind I had been hoping to avoid seeing him. This was a reprieve. It did not last long, however. His secretary called me and said that Mr. Ravan wanted me to drop by his home that evening.

AS BEFORE, there were several technicians working under the boss's supervision when I reached his trophy room in Ravan Retreat. This time they were adding some studio mementoes to the colorful array of souvenirs and miscellaneous oddities in wall cabinets.

Mr. Ravan stopped his work and showed me around.

"That was here when I bought the place," he said when he saw me looking attentively at a small arsenal of gangster firearms under glass. "My friends get a kick out of it."

I was glad for this little friendly warm-up of conversation and hoped that the Moon allegations would find him even tempered after he heard them. I was wrong.

As he listened, he went icy hard, holding back his true feelings

by an all too visible effort of will power.

"This room may be bugged," he said. "I never was sure of it."

We went out to the flagstones of an extensive rose garden that he had put in to flank his swimming pool. The hot evening air did nothing to remove the aura of squirming hate that now filled him and made his glances sharp with suspicion and his movements stiff, wary, aware.

I soon learned that the information that was now mine by courtesy of Johnny Moon had elevated me to a new niche in the studio echelon.

"Bar that bum from the studio from now on," he said. "He's playing both ends against the middle. He's no regular newspaperman anyway. I've suspected him as a shakedown artist for years."

Then he told me why the prison release of Caruso McGuire had upset his life.

"I was in a gang of high school punks in North Beach in San Francisco," he said. "All we did bad was rob a few fruit wagons and some wine cellars. That's how I met McGuire—selling stolen grappa to him. He was a small-time bootlegger who met his customers on street corners. Bathtub gin. Three fifths for five bucks.

"McGuire worked his way into hi-jacking and took a few of us kids with his hoods to be lookouts at Halfmoon Bay. The boats looked like part of the crab fleet but they were dhingies off a ship from Canada. They would row in the stuff to their rum runners on the beach. When the booze trucks started up the highway the hi-jackers shot out truck lights and took over.

"One night the cops surprised McGuire by hiding in the back hills. I was caught and booked at the Hall of Justice. I got a good working over, which I deserved, but I didn't dump, as they used to say. They let me go. McGuire was released because he dumped the names of everyone in his gang. He was the singer, all right. That's what caught up with him in Chicago.

"He went to Chicago by request. The San Francisco police were on a drive to keep the city free of hoods. Caruso was rousted with a bunch of bad eggs who came in from the Middle West to set up a payoff syndicate.

"This last was 'The Big Roust' that my father had helped engineer. I had no intention of interrupting Maro Ravan with my knowledge. There were other things more important to learn.

"Moon is crazy when he says Maylian Maidan is my niece. My sister never went out with cheap hoods. Only three people are alive who know who Maylian Maidan is. Myself, Jake Foss the grips who is an old friend, and now you. Maylian has no idea in the world

that Tony Valla was her father. She thinks she was an orphan.

"My sister raised her on a vineyard in the Napa Valley. Her own father wanted the kid to think she was an orphan. Tony didn't want her to know about the mess he got into with a girl in the neighborhood.

"Tony Valla was the finest friend I ever had. He fought my battles in North Beach because I was pretty yellow about using my fists. He didn't like McGuire and told him so and one day we found Tony barely alive in an alley off Filbert Street. Three hoods tackled him with brass knuckles and bottle glass."

A commotion back at the big house attracted our attention, but Maro Ravan was so wound up that he did not pay more than passing attention to the noise and the slamming of doors. Presently one of the workmen came out to us with the news that a fire marshal had come into the grounds with a warning. A brush fire was now burning about ten miles away on the San Fernando Valley side of the mountains. Precautions were in order for everybody living in the canyons on both sides of the ridge land. The 'Santa Ana' was riding sparks in all directions.

Maro Ravan showed no alarm at the fire warning nor did he seem to notice the brisk, warmish wind in his face. He had been through fire warnings many times before. And now a fire of his own was spreading inside of him.

"I have my own idea how Valla died," he said. "We had talked about this shakedown. Tony cracked apart when he heard Caruso's demands. He was fighting my battles again, and his daughter's, when he went looking for McGuire. Some young goon with McGuire must have got to Tony first, for if ever you've seen a waterfront fighter, it was Tony. He could lick grown men when he was a kid."

We went back into the house and sat in front of the spacious fireplace.

"I've told you all this," he said, "because a man needs friends to talk to. And you're from San Francisco. I know a little about you, you see. Eddie Murphy, once a newspaperman. His father, a well-known detective."

"I've known some things I haven't talked about, myself," I said and felt better for now admitting it. "A cop friend of my father's saw you not so long ago and said you could be a man named Mario Ravanessi."

"I am. I am and I'm proud of it. At last I'm proud of it. I thought it all out today. This afternoon I ordered McGuire to come up here and state his case. Why the horsing around? If he's on the shorts, I'll give him money to get out of town. If he thinks he can blackmail me, I want to tell him to his face that

he can't. I fight my own battles now."

He looked at me and smiled knowingly, a rare thing for him. "The world has been pretty good to me, Eddie," he said. "I got a little education at Galileo High and turned it into a big thing. I had what was missing in this picture industry and Hollywood wanted it when bad times came along. Mostly what I did was stick up for the studio when phoneys tried to milk it. Now I'm going beyond that and show some real guts. The kind that Tony Valla had."

"You're not going to meet McGuire alone?"

He pointed to the workmen at the cases. "Those fellows will be in another part of the house just in case any rough stuff starts. I would like you to be close by, too. Other than that, yes. I'm going to meet him alone."

NONELESS, it did not happen that way after all.

The telephone at the gatehouse brought word soon that two visitors were waiting. Ravan gave the word to let them in, then told his workmen to leave.

Caruso McGuire and Johnny Moon walked down the stairs and into the trophy room.

The boss glanced at the two of them in the distance and said, "You stay with me, Eddie."

We walked slowly down half the length of the trophy room, past rows of remembrances of triumphs. Mr. Ravan came within several yards of the two men and then went to the door, took a key from his pocket, and locked the door from the inside. He placed the key in my hand and stood before McGuire.

There was no expression at all on McGuire's face. He looked straight at Ravan. Johnny Moon, who had hovered close to McGuire in an attending posture suggesting an interpreter, spoke first.

"Maro, Caruso is here because you have something to say to him. What is it? Are you ready to deal?"

"No dice, Caruso," Ravan said in an up-beat voice of strength. "I'm telling you to your face. If you dreamed of sandbagging me while you sat in Joliet, you picked the wrong man. Peddle your wares somewhere else. If you need a few hundred to get out of town, that's something else again. I guess you understand me."

Maro Ravan was like a confident old pirate—tough, straight, and in full charge before McGuire. I thought of myself, foolishly, in the role of a fight announcer in the center of the ring, ready to start the brawl between two men who knew what was coming.

"Is that all you have to say?" Johnny Moon asked as he broke the silence.

"He'll talk to me and he'll talk plenty," said McGuire. His voice was high-pitched, which surprised

me, but it had a turbine whine of power in it.

"I want two hundred grand," Caruso continued. "You figure out what for. A fellow wrote up what I told him in the pen. It's ready to print. Two hundred grand is for stuff I didn't tell him yet. You want that stuff kept out, Mario?"

Johnny Moon looked at his client curiously at the word 'Mario.'

Maro Ravan shifted around to Johnny Moon, ignoring McGuire and said, "Listen, bum. I met McGuire when I was a kid in San Francisco. He's built it up to you as something it isn't. Now, you creep, get out."

I unlocked the door and Johnny Moon stepped past me fast, to the outside.

Maro Ravan moved around to face McGuire again. The ex-convict's face quivered for the first time.

"You heard me," Ravan said to McGuire. "That's all I've got to say to you."

McGuire shook his shoulders, slouched a bit, and said with a dry contempt in his voice, "You've kidded the public a long time, haven't you, Mario? Big shot in Hollywood. Live like a king. You must have a million bucks salted away. All those years you got rich I worked in a crummy prison laundry.

"You're gonna make it up to me or you're finished. Get that—finished. I'll have you laughed out of town. Ravanessi the hi-jacker. Pushes his niece into big-time money. You're a laugh, Mario. You're just a phony with a big front and nothing behind it—a gutless coward who has to have somebody else do his fighting for him. You've got a creep here with you now, like in San Francisco. I might have expected that."

This was something of a compliment to me, I thought. I never imagined I had looked that tough, although it was a fact that Dad had brought me up on boxing and I had played almost every sport they offered at USF.

Maro Ravan did not answer him. He walked back to the wall near the fireplace, banged his fist hard against the glass of a cabinet, and came back slowly with a tommy-gun in his hands.

McGuire looked at Ravan and drew back. There were two things in front of him to be afraid of—the tommy-gun and the wild evil darting around in Maro Ravan's eyes.

A rumble of knocking on the door then came through to the three

of us. We heard people shouting behind the door.

"The fire's coming."

I went to a window and pushed aside drapes. I saw with a jolt of fright that what seemed before through a slit in the drapes as a glow of lights from far Malibu and the Pacific Coast Highway was the up-flare reflection of marching brush fire against clouds of rolling fog and smoke. From that direction there was coming a new fire, touched off by a cloudy highway of sparks from the original brush fire over the crest in the Valley.

"We stay here, McGuire," said Ravan. "This place is fireproof. You, Eddie. Go outside now. See that nobody runs."

I closed the door on them and made my way in a forming wall of heat to the back of the house and came out into open ground under an orange-yellow canopy of reflected fire in front of me and a living net of flying sparks around me.

The cavalry charge of the fire through the tinder-dry brush banged away like packages of tiny firecrackers. The mobile furnace was half a mile away.

I hurried to the western side of the gardens, to see a penning ring of flames on legs of the wind, moving fast up canyons. Brighter and whiter dots and spots in the confused distance marked houses on paved streets that were exploding from within with the compression of fire and heat. Sparks swirled in gusty thousands; plankings and shingles went swiftly white with disintegrating flames.

Overhead in the golden smoke rode the red, white, and green lights of two helicopters, a news service and the police.

I saw the swoop of a modified military bomber from U. S. Forestry Service, and the down swoosh of its liquid borate splash on the fiery roof of a house in a canyon westward.

If we had only been normal people and had watched the swift rise of the fire to these hellish proportions and had marked the warnings of TV and radio stations and the billowing smoke and the growing shriek of sirens, we would never have been caught surrounded on this island of man-made green at the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains.

I came back from the flagstones near the estate pool and went inside the house. Smoke smelled up the place and air was hot and hard to breathe. I ran through the corridors which were lit up only by fire glow from outside. I shouted for whomsoever might be there, but no answer came.

I realized that everybody had run for it and now Ravan, McGuire, and I were alone with the furnace flames of a circular fire getting closer and noiser and more suffocating.

I looked out the front door and

saw fire fighters and equipment at frenzied work a half mile away where city streets carved the last canyon into terraces and rows of luxury houses. These homes of Names in the Land of Make Believe, waited in the path of the fire sweeping up from the dead brush on the gully slopes.

Ravan Retreat was now a mirror catching flame light on its walls, outside and in. No sweating firemen on the faraway streets had time to think about this solid fort of a house. No fire fighters were free to find out if anyone remained inside.

The steady crack and bite of exploding brush clumps grew louder.

Then a blast of gun fire sounded out from the basement. Rapid, chilling repeats of the volley, chattered again.

I found the stairs in the swirl of smoke and opened the door to the trophy room.

Maro Ravan kneeled on the floor in the far end of the room and the tommy-gun was lined up on a man practically dodging like a dancer from side to side in the corner.

Ravan squeezed the trigger and the gun jumped and sprayed up from left to right and the man fell back and down to the floor. Again Maro fired. Then he lurched up from his kneeling position and staggered back into a leather chair before the fireplace.

When I reached him I saw blood spattered on his coat and his trousers and oozing through his shirt front. The tommy-gun was in his hands and the metal circle of the ammunition cover glittered on his knees. His eyes were dilated, and beginning to glaze. I tried to shake him awake.

A clatter echoed from the open hearth and a small roar from the chimney preceded a tumble of bricks that cascaded around his feet.

The tumbled bricks were smoking hot.

I lifted the tommy-gun from his hands and jammed it into the cabinet with the broken glass. I came back and shook him again. His head inclined to the side. He knew that I was there, for he weakly pressed my hand. He could not move his body.

"Tony," he said in a far-away voice. "Tony."

I held his head up straighter and was Tony Valla for him.

"I got him for you, Tony. I got him. He rushed me, almost killed me. But I fought him, Tony. I got his gun—"

His teeth clenched tight in a grinding pressure. A trickle of blood flowed down from his compressed lips. I felt his heart thump under my probing hand. Then the beat stopped and Mario Ravanessi was dead.

A new roar sounded out from the fireplace and hot bricks, plaster, and a stream of red sparks

sluiced out of the chimney towards me.

I ran for my life.

I broke out into a scalding wave of live, shimmering heat and ran to the pool.

From the roof of Ravan's fireproofed mansion streams of fire shot out from inside the house. The windows glowed white; then burst in red-orange puffs. Ropes of running fire ran through the corridors and stairways inside and leaped out of gables, windows, and doors.

I bobbed up and down in the water of the pool to escape the worst of the wall of explosive, red hot air. Then the burning became strong, steady, and rhythmically crackling. The wave of brush fire passed on from the ring of the estate and rolled away towards the city streets of the canyons.

I sat in protecting water and watched Maro Ravan's big house reduce itself like a fire scene on a Ravan set, losing first the roof, then the gables, then the doorways, and finally collapsing into a great quarry of white hot ashes and seething, melting muck.

A fire lieutenant ventured into the estate a while later to case the great hole of white hot ash, flames, and rubble. I called to him and he came running.

In half an hour I was at a mobile hospital in a burned-out canyon; exhausted, scarcely aware of the blatting at microphones and the red eyes of TV cameras in front of me. I remember an oxygen bag going over me, and then, they tell me, I passed out, shivering like a sick dog.

JOHNNY MOON wrote quite a fire story and it got top billing on his circuit and landed him a few more clients. He described the trophy room setting perfectly and dwelt on Ravan's confidence in the fireproof mansion. He ticked off the fiction of a routine business meeting between Ravan and McGuire to discuss a picture built around the ex-convict's life in Chicago. Moon actually had the gall to give himself the credit for arranging the fateful meeting on behalf of T.A.C. and Gus Mannstein.

He never mentioned that I was there.

I called up Moon several weeks later, when they released me from the hospital with my second degree burns healed. I intended to ask him, innocently enough, if he had collected his fee in advance for his public relations work.

He was not in and I left word. He never called me back. Perhaps he was filing me away with other aspects of other unwritten stories about the inhabitants of the Land of Make Believe.

Not only was Arsene Lupin the most engaging and colorful rogue in French mystery fiction. His police-defying insolence was enlivened by qualities so irresistibly human that he has delighted three generations of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. And here he is in an escapade so astonishingly contemporary in flavor that we were seriously tempted to re-title it: "The Return of Arsene Lupin."

THE ESCAPE OF ARSENE LUPIN

by MAURICE LEBLANC

When Arsene Lupin made a promise to the police the whole of Paris knew that he would keep it. But it was difficult to see how he could accomplish the impossible.

As soon as Arsene Lupin had finished his meal he took from his pocket a slender cigar and after examining it meditatively for an instant peeled off the red and gold band. He was about to carry it to his lips when the door of the cell opened. He had scarcely time to toss the cigar into the drawer and move away from the table when the turnkey entered. It was time for the daily promenade.

"I was expecting you, my friend," Lupin said good-humoredly.

They went out together and had barely disappeared down the corridor when two men glided into the cell and began a minute investigation of its walls and furnishings. One was Inspector Dieuzy, and the other Inspector Folenfoux.

Every effort was being made to solve the mystery. They knew now that Arsene Lupin had communication with the outside world. Just the evening before, the *Grand Journal* had published the following letter received by its court reporter:

Monsieur:

In a recent article you spoke of me in terms to which I strongly object. A few days before my trial begins I shall call upon you for an explanation.

Best regards,
Arsene Lupin.

The writing was certainly that of Arsene Lupin, which proved that

he was able to write letters while confined in his cell. In that case, he was probably receiving them also and preparing for the escape that he had so arrogantly announced.

Such a state of affairs was manifestly intolerable. At the request of Judge Bovier, the chief of police, Monsieur Dudouis, came in person to the prison to show the superintendent what precautions ought to be taken.

As soon as Dudouis arrived he had sent two of his best men, Inspectors Dieuzy and Folenfoux to the prisoner's cell. They pried up each of the tiles, took down the bed, carried out all the details of a thorough search and discovered nothing.

They were on the point of leaving, when the turnkey hastily entered and said: "The drawer—look in the table drawer! When I came in to get him he was just closing it."

They opened the drawer and looked in. Dieuzy cried out: "By heaven, we have him this time, the rascal!"

Folenfoux stopped him: "Just a moment, my young friend!" he said warningly, "the chief must see everything as it stands."

"But this excellent cigar!"

"Just leave it where you found it, and notify the chief."

A few minutes later Monsieur Dudouis was exploring the drawer. He found first a bundle of newspaper clippings about Arsene Lupin. They were furnished by a regular press agency. Then he removed a tobacco-pouch, a pipe, some thin, fine letter-paper and two books.

The chief of police glanced at their titles. One was Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship,* an English edition de luxe: The other was a copy of *Epictetus* a German edition, published in Leyden in 1634. Turning over the leaves, Dudouis observed that all the pages had been cut. Words were underlined and there were frequent marginal notes written in pencil. Had he stumbled on a secret correspondence code or did the notes simply show the reader's fondness for the book?

We'll consider both possibilities later," said Monsieur Dudouis. He examined the tobacco pouch and the pipe. Then taking the cigar, he remarked: "Our friend lives well! This is a Henry Clay."

With the mechanical impulse of a smoker he lifted it to his lips and pressed it lightly with his fingers. To his astonishment it yielded to the pressure. He examined the cigar more attentively and presently discovered something white between the leaves of tobacco.

Then carefully, by means of a pin, Dudouis drew forth a fine roll of paper about the size of a toothpick. It was a note and, when unrolled, revealed the fine writing of a lady's hand:

The Maria has been substituted for the other. Eight of the ten are

loose. By pressing it with your outside foot, the plate rises from below. From twelve to sixteen each day. H.P. will wait. But where? Answer at once. Be assured, your friend is on the watch for you.

Monsieur Dudouis thought for a moment and said: "Quite clear. The Maria—the eight compartments—from twelve to sixteen is from noon till four."

"But this H.P. which is to wait?" Dieuzy asked.

"H.P. in this case must mean 'automobile'—in other words—'horse-power', the sporting term for a motor-car. A forty horsepower, a sixty horse-power and so on. It is a well known English term."

Dudouis rose and asked: "Did the prisoner finish his lunch?"

"Yes," Folenfoux said.

"Then, as he had not yet read this note—as is apparent from the condition of the cigar—he must have just received it."

"But how?"

"In his food—in the middle of his loaf of bread or a potato. What difference does it make?"

Inspector Folenfoux frowned.

"Impossible. We have only allowed his meals to be sent in so as to catch him in the trap, and nothing was ever found."

"We shall look for Lupin's answer this evening. For the present, keep him out of his cell. I shall take this to the judge. If he follows my advice, he will have the letter photographed at once and in an hour you will be able to replace in the drawer not only these other objects but an identically similar cigar containing the original note. The prisoner must suspect nothing."

When Monsieur Dudouis returned that evening with Inspector Dieuzy to the prison office, he felt a strong curiosity as to the prisoner's answer. On a stove in the corner were three plates.

"Has he eaten?" asked Dudouis.

"Yes," said the superintendent.

"Dieuzy, please cut into fine pieces those bits of macaroni and then investigate that crust of bread."

Inspector Dieuzy complied. After a moment he said: Nothing, monsieur."

Monsieur Dudouis examined the plates, the fork, the spoon and finally the knife. It was a regulation prison knife with a blunt rounded blade. He twisted its handle to the left and then to the right. With the latter movement, the handle yielded and unscrewed. It was hollow and had served as a receptacle for a leaf of paper which he withdrew carefully.

"This is pretty stupid for a man of Lupin's caliber," Dudouis said, shaking his head. "But let us lose no time. Dieuzy, you'd better go and search this restaurant. Make a thorough job of it. I don't care how long it takes."

Then he read the thin sheaf of paper:

I shall depend upon you. H.P. will follow daily at a distance. I shall go in front. Au revoir, dear friend.

"At last," cried Monsieur Dudouis, rubbing his hands together. "I'm confident now we can make something of the affair. A little assistance from us and the escape will be effected in such a way that we'll be able to capture his accomplices!"

"But what if Arsene Lupin succeeds in slipping through your fingers?" asked Superintendent Hebard anxiously.

"We shall use as many policemen and detectives as we need. But if he should prove too skillful, so much the worse for him! As for the rest of the band, since their chief refuses to talk they will get a chance."

Certainly Arsene Lupin did not have much to say. For several, months Judge Jules Bouvier had been making strenuous efforts to get something out of him, but the examination consisted of nothing but uninteresting colloquies between the judge and the attorney for the defense, Maitre Danval, one of the leading lights of the bar, who knew, however as little about the accused as any man in the street.

From time to time, out of politeness, Arsene Lupin would remark: "Why yes, Judge, it is all right. The robbery of the Credit Lyonnais, the theft in the rue Babylone, the making of the counterfeit bank-notes, the fradulent insurance policies, the spoilation of the chateaux of Armesnil, of Gourel, of Imblevain, of Groseillers, of Malaquis, all that is the work of your humble servant."

"Then kindly explain to me—"

"Why explain? I confess everything wholesale, and ten times as much more of which you are ignorant."

Losing patience at last, the judge had ceased these annoying examinations. But the discovery of the two notes soon placed him under the moral obligation of resuming them.

Regularly each noon, Arsene Lupin was taken from the prison to the court in the prison wagon along with a few other prisoners. They started back about four o'clock.

One afternoon the return journey was somewhat unusual. The other prisoners had not yet been examined and it was decided to bring Arsene Lupin back in the vehicle alone.

These prison wagons, commonly known as "Black Marias," are divided longitudinally by a central passage into which open the ten compartments, five at the right and five at the left. Each of these compartments is so small that the occupant must assume a sitting posture, and the five prisoners consequently are seated one in front of another. They are still isolated by the parallel partitions,

however, and a police officer at the end watches the passage.

Arsene Lupin was placed in the third cell to the right and the heavy vehicle started. He was aware that they had passed the Quay de l'Horologe and were about in front of the Palais de Justice. When they were well out on the Pont Saint Michel, he pressed with his outside foot, that is, the left foot, the metal plate which formed the outside wall of his cell. It was a test which he had made several times before. Immediately something yielded and the plate gradually rose. He saw that he was exactly between the two wheels.

Lupin looked out attentively and waited. The wagon was slowly climbing the Boulevard Saint Michel. At the Carrefour Saint Germain it halted. A truck had stalled and a blockade of cabs and omnibuses stood directly in the path of the vehicle.

Arsene thrust his head through the opening. Another prison wagon stood beside the one which he occupied. He lifted the metal plate a little higher, placed his foot on one of the spokes of the wheel and leaped lightly down to the ground.

A coachman saw him and burst into laughter. Then, realizing what was happening, he tried to give the alarm. But his voice was drowned in the noise of the vehicles which had again begun to move. Besides, Arsene Lupin was already gone.

Lupin took a few hurried steps, reached the walk at the left, and made a quick survey of his surroundings. He hesitated a moment as though undecided which way to go, then calmly thrust his hands in his pockets and passed on up the boulevard.

It was pleasant weather, a gentle autumn day, and the cafes were full to overflowing. At a table in front of the Cafe Soufflot, Arsene Lupin seated himself.

He ordered a glass of beer and a package of cigarettes. He sipped his beer slowly, calmly lit a cigarette and then a second. Finally he rose and asked the waiter to summon the manager.

The manager came, and Arsene Lupin said loudly enough to be heard by all: "I am sorry, monsieur, but I have forgotten my purse. Perhaps my name is well enough known to permit you to carry an account on your books for a few days: *Arsene Lupin.*"

The manager looked at him and grinned, as if he thought it a joke. But the amused smile vanished from his face when Arsene repeated: "Lupin, prisoner at the Sante, now escaped. I assume that my name inspires perfect confidence?"

He withdrew amidst a startled exchange of glances, leaving the manager too stunned to object.

Lupin crossed the rue Soufflot

and took the rue Saint Jacques. He followed it calmly, smoking as he went and occasionally stopping to look in the shop windows. At the Boulevard de Port Royal, he asked his way, then walked straight toward the rue de la Sante.

The high, gloomy walls of the prison soon rose before him. Passing under them, he approached the soldier who had just mounted guard, and touching his hat said: "Is this the Prison de la Sante?"

"Yes," the guard replied, giving Lupin a searching look.

"I should like to get back to my cell. The wagon dropped me on the road, and I do not care to take unfair advantage of an accident the police could hardly have anticipated."

The guard growled out: "Look here, my fine fellow, move on and be quick about it."

"I beg your pardon, but I am going straight through that gate, and if you prevent Arsene Lupin from passing it may be expensive business for you, mon ami."

"Arsene Lupin! What are you giving me?"

"I regret that I have not a card," said Arsene Lupin, feeling in his pockets.

The guard looked him over in profound astonishment. Then, as though in spite of himself, he rang the bell. The iron gate opened.

After a few minutes Superintendent Hebard approached, gesticulating and feigning great wrath. Arsene Lupin smiled.

"Come now, superintendent, don't try to get the best of me," he said. "You arrange a trip for me alone in the wagon. You even set up a nice little blockade and you fancy I am going to take to my legs and go off to meet my friends. What about the twenty detectives who were escorting us on foot, in cabs and with bicycles? That would have been a nice affair and perhaps I might have been hurt! Look here, superintendent, was that what you wished?"

Then Lupin shrugged his shoulders and added: "I beg you, superintendent, not to bother about me. The day I care to escape, I shall need no assistance."

TWO DAYS LATER, the *Echo de France,* which was becoming the official organ of Arsene Lupin's exploits—people said he was one of its chief stockholders—published the most complete details of his recent escape. Even the text of the notes exchanged between the prisoner and his mysterious friend, the means used for this correspondence, the complicity of the police, the walk up the Boulevard Saint Michel, the incident of the Cafe Soufflot, were all set forth in great detail.

It was stated that Inspector Dieuzy's examination of the waiters had produced no result, and,

marvel of marvels, it was shown that the prison wagon in which he had been transported had been a "fixed" one that his fellow-conspirators had substituted for one of the six regular wagons of the prison establishment.

No one now doubted the coming, previously announced escape of Arsene Lupin. Moreover, he himself heralded it in unmistakable terms as shown by his answers to Judge Bouvier on the day after the incident. When the judge chided him about his failure, Arsene Lupin said coolly: "Listen carefully to this, monsieur! You may believe me or not, but that *attempted* escape was a part of my general plan of escape!"

"I do not understand," grinned the judge.

"There is no reason why you should."

Then in the course of this examination which appeared later in full in the *Echo de France* Arsene Lupin exclaimed wearily: "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! What is the use? These examinations are to no purpose! I hope the public will realize how ridiculous they are."

"What do you mean, monsieur?" asked Judge Bouvier.

"Why, I am not going to attend my trial."

"You are not going to attend—"

"Certainly not! It is a sort of monomania with me—an irrevocable decision. Nothing would induce me to behave in so absurd a way."

Such assurance and the inexplicable paragraphs appearing in the paper both excited and disconcerted the authorities. There were evidently certain things which Arsene Lupin alone knew and the explanation of which could come only from him. But how could he be made to divulge his secrets?

Arsene Lupin was removed to another cell, one on the floor below. Judge Bouvier suspended his inquiries and turned the affair over to the courts for trial.

Silence followed—a silence of two months. Arsene Lupin spent these two months stretched on his bed with his face almost always turned toward the wall. The change of cell seemed to have disheartened him. He refused to receive his lawyer. He hardly spoke to his keepers.

Public interest grew more intense. Arsene Lupin's escape was expected daily. It was almost desired, for his ingenuity, resourcefulness and the mystery surrounding his life had endeared him to the man in the street. Arsene Lupin *would* escape. People were even astonished that it had not yet happened.

Every morning the chief of police asked his secretary: "Has he gone yet?"

"No, monsieur, he's still in his cell."

"It will be tomorrow, then," said Dudois.

On the day before the trial, a gentleman appeared at the editorial office of the *Grand Journal,* asked for the court reporter, threw his card in his face and withdrew rapidly. On the card was written these words: "Arsene Lupin always keeps his promises."

Affairs were at this stage when the trial opened.

The court room was crowded. Everyone was anxious to see the famous Arsene Lupin and came expecting to enjoy his rapier-skilled fencing with the court. Lawyers and magistrates, reporters and men of fashion, artists and society ladies—all Paris strove to witness this extraordinary trial.

It was a rainy, dismal, somber day and Arsene Lupin could not be clearly seen when he was brought in by the guards. However, his unwieldy movements, the manner in which he dropped into his seat, and his indifferent immobility disappointed the spectators.

Several times his lawyer, one of Maitre Danval's secretaries—for the latter had objected to the ridiculous position in which he had been placed—several times his lawyer spoke to him. He shook his head and remained stubbornly silent.

The court clerk read the accusation and Judge Jules Bouvier ordered: "Accused, stand up! Your name, Christian name, age and profession?"

Receiving no response he repeated: "Your name, I ask your name!"

A dull weary voice replied: "Baudru, Désiré."

Murmurs of incredulity arose, but Judge Bouvier went on sarcastically: "Baudru, Désiré? Ah, very good! A new incarnation! Since it is about the eighth name to which you lay claim and is certainly as fabulous as the others, we may dispense with it and request that you kindly answer to the name of Arsene Lupin, by which you are more widely known."

The judge consulted his notes and continued: "Despite all our investigation, it has been impossible to establish your identity. Your case is peculiar in the annals of criminal jurisprudence, for apparently you have no past. We do not know who you are, whence you come nor where your childhood was spent—in short, nothing. Three years ago you suddenly burst upon us from parts unknown, revealing at a flash Arsene Lupin, that is, a curious mixture of intelligence and perversity, of crime and generosity.

"The data we have gathered regarding your previous life are mostly suppositious. It is probable that Emil Rostat, who eight years ago was the assistant of the magician Dickson, was no other

than Arsene Lupin. It is probable that the Russian student who six years ago worked in the laboratories of Dr. Altier at the Hospital Saint Louis, and so often astounded his master by the cleverness of his hypotheses on bacteriology and the boldness of his experiments in skin diseases, was no other than Arsene Lupin.

"Arsene Lupin, also may have been the instructor in Japanese boxing who established his school in Paris long before we heard of jiu-jitsu. Arsene Lupin, we believe, was the bicycle racer who won the Grand Prix at the exposition, collected his ten thousand dollars and disappeared. Arsene Lupin, perhaps was also the mysterious man who saved so many people by the little window at the Charity Bazaar disaster—and picked their pockets for good measure."

Then after a moment's pause, Judge Bouvier concluded: "Such may have been the past, which seems to have been merely a careful training for the warfare against society which you have undertaken—a methodical apprenticeship during which you developed to the highest degree your strength, your energy and your skill. Do you admit the accuracy of these facts?"

During this speech, the accused had been shifting his weight from one leg to the other, with bent back and lifeless arms. The strong light brought out his extreme thinness, his hollow cheeks, his protruding cheek-bones, his ashen color blotched with little reddish spots and framed in a sparse uneven beard. Long confinement behind bars had considerably aged and wasted him.

It was difficult to recognize in the prisoner at the bar the graceful form and youthful countenance with which all Paris was so familiar from the handsome pictures that had appeared in the daily papers.

Anyone would have sworn that he had not heard the question put to him. Twice it was repeated before he raised his eyes, seemed to reflect and murmured with obvious weariness: "Baudru, Désiré."

The judge laughed. "I do not understand your method of defense," he said. "If you care to play tricks on fools, Arsene Lupin, go ahead. But for my part I shall pay no attention to your game."

Then Bouvier entered upon the enumeration of the accusations of robbery, house-breaking and forgeries attributed to Arsene Lupin. Occasionally he questioned the prisoner. The latter grunted or failed to answer at all.

The hearing of testimony began. There were a number of insignificant depositions, but when Arsene Lupin's old foe, the famous Inspector Ganimard appeared, new interest was aroused.

At first, however, the old sleuth

caused some disappointment. He seemed uneasy and anxious. Not that he was afraid, for he was too accustomed to such things. But several times he glanced toward the accused with apparent doubt. Still, with his hands on the rail, he related the incidents in which he had participated, his pursuit of the prisoner across Europe and his journey to America.

Ganimard was accorded a rapt attention which remained uninterrupted by so much as a cough for thirty full minutes. Finally, after he had twice alluded to his intimacy with Arsene Lupin, he hesitated. It was clear that some other idea was uppermost in his mind.

"If you are ill," said Judge Bouvier, "we had better interrupt your testimony."

"No, no, but—" Ganimard halted and looked long and carefully at the accused, then said: "I ask the authority of the court to examine the prisoner more closely. There is a mystery that must be cleared up."

Ganimard drew nearer, and looked at the accused more carefully, with all his attention concentrated upon details of the man's face and form. Then he returned to the bar with more excitement than solemnity in his manner.

"Judge, the prisoner here before me is not Arsene Lupin," he said. "I will swear to that under oath!"

A deep silence pervaded the courtroom for a moment. The judge, stupefied, said: "What are you saying? You must be quite mad!"

Inspector Ganimard tightened his lips. "At first glance I was a little uncertain, for there is indeed a resemblance. But a moment's examination removed all doubt. The nose, the mouth, the hair, the color of the skin—everything is different. This man is not Arsene Lupin! Why, you have only to look at his eyes! Did he ever have those bloodshot, drunkard's eyes?"

"Come, come!" said Judge Bouvier. "Let us have an understanding. What is your explanation?"

"I cannot explain. Perhaps Lupin has substituted for himself some poor devil whom he would like to see condemned in his place. Or perhaps this man is an accomplice."

Shouts, laughter, exclamations rose on all hands in the courtroom at this unexpected discovery. The preliminary judge before whom Arsene Lupin had appeared previously was summoned, as were also the guards and the superintendent of the Prison de la Sante. The hearing was adjourned.

WHEN THESE HAD appeared and court was again called to order, Inspector Folenfoux and Superintendent Hebard declared that between this man and Arsene Lupin there was only a very vague resemblance of features.

"Well then," cried Judge Bouvier, "Who is he? How does he happen to be in court?"

The two guards from the Sante were summoned. Remarkable contradiction—they recognized the prisoner who had been under their care! The judge gave a sigh of relief.

But one of the guards said: "Yes, yes, I certainly think it is the same man."

"You think! What do you mean?"

"Why, I hardly saw him. He was turned over to me in the evening and for the last two months he has been lying down with his face toward the wall."

"And before he was turned over to you?"

"He did not occupy cell twenty-four."

A tiny muscle in the judge's jaw began to twitch.

"We are confronted, then, with a substitution effected two months ago! How do you explain it?"

"No explanation is possible."

In despair, Judge Bouvier turned to the prisoner and asked pleasantly: "Accused, will you not tell the court how and when you fell into the hands of the authorities?"

Apparently the kindly tone had removed the man's apprehension or stimulated his mental activity. He tried to answer, and finally after gentle but skillful questioning, they succeeded in eliciting a few sentences which shed considerable light on what had taken place.

Two months before he had been taken to jail. He had spent a night and the next morning there. Since he had seventy-five centimes in his pocket, he had been released. But, as he was passing through the prison yard, two guards had laid hold of him and thrust him into the prison wagon.

Since then he had occupied cell No. 24, not without comfort; He had enough to eat, and had slept pretty well, so he had made no complaint.

It all seemed so plausible that Judge Bouvier was constrained to adjourn the case indefinitely to permit further investigation and amid general mirth the crowd dispersed, ignoring that dignitary's extremely unhappy look.

The investigation at once established this fact on record in the blotter of the district jail. Eight weeks before, a man named Desire Baudru had slept at the jail. He had been set at liberty on the next day and had left the jail at two in the afternoon. On that same day, after his last appearance before the investigating judge, Arsene Lupin had been taken back to prison and to a new cell.

Had the guards committed an error? Deceived by the resemblance, had they in a moment of carelessness substituted this man for their prisoner? If so, they must

have been much less strict than is required by the regulations.

Had the substitution been planned in advance? Besides the fact that jails and prisons render such tricks most difficult, it involved the complicity of Baudru. He would have been compelled to get himself arrested purposely and with the intention of taking Arsene Lupin's place. Then by what miracle had such a plan, constructed entirely upon a series of improbable chances, fortuitous occurrences and fabulous errors, been able to succeed?

Desire Baudru was subjected to a close examination by the Bertillon system, but there was no description on the register corresponding to his measurements. Besides, trace of him was easily found. At Courbevoie, at Asnieres, at Levallois, he was known. He begged for livelihood, and slept in one of those rag pickers' huts near the Ternes quarter. For a year, however, he had been gone.

Had Baudru been tampered with by Arsene Lupin? There was no reason to believe that such was the case. Even if it had been so, it would not explain the flight of the prisoner. The miracle remained a miracle. Of the twenty hypotheses suggested in explanation, none was satisfactory.

The escape itself was the sole certainty—the incomprehensible, startling escape in which the authorities and the public alike could discern every evidence of a long preparation, culminating in a series of acts marvelously interrelated and fully justifying the insolent claim of Arsene Lupin: "I shall not attend my trial."

After a month of careful consideration the problem presented the same insuperable difficulties. They could not detain this poor devil, Baudru. His trial would have been ridiculous, for what charges could they bring against him? Judge Bouvier, therefore, signed the order for his immediate release.

Rene Dubouis, the chief of police, determined to keep close watch upon him. The idea came from Ganimard. It had seemed to him that there was neither complicity nor chance, but that Baudru was a tool that Arsene Lupin had used with his wonderful skill. It was possible that, if free, Baudru would lead them to Lupin or at least to one of his band.

Ganimard took with him Inspectors Folenfoux and Dieuzy, and the three were on the alert when the prison gates swung open to Desire Baudru.

It was a foggy morning in January and the poor fellow seemed at first irresolute, walking away as though hardly knowing what to do with his time. He followed the rue de la Sante and the rue Saint Jacques. Reaching a second-hand shop, he removed his coat and waistcoat, sold the latter for a few

pennies, drew on his coat again and walked ahead.

He crossed the Seine; at the Chatelet, the Montnartre-Place-Saint-Michel omnibus passed and he attempted to catch it. There was no room, and the conductor advised him to get a check and wait for the next one. He entered the little waiting-room.

At this moment Ganimard called his two men to him and, without losing the waiting-room from view, said hurriedly: "Call a cab—no, two! That will be safer. I shall go with one of you and we shall follow him."

The men obeyed, but Baudru did not reappear. Ganimard went to the door. There was no one there.

"Idiot that I am!" he murmured. "I completely overlooked the other door!"

The room indeed connected by a hall with the outer waiting-room on the rue Saint Martin. Ganimard dashed through and arrived just in time to see Baudru seated on the upper deck of the Batignolles-Jardin de Plantes omnibus as it turned the corner of the rue de Rivoli. He ran and finally caught the omnibus, but he had lost his two assistants. He was alone to continue the pursuit.

In his anger he was on the point of taking the vagrant by the collar and summarily arresting him. Was it not with premeditation and by an ingenious ruse that this so-called imbecile had separated him from his men?

Ganimard glanced at Baudru. He was dozing on the bench and his head nodded from side to side as they rolled along. The man's mouth was open and his face had an expression of complete stupidity. Certainly this was not an adversary able to outwit old Ganimard! Chance had favored him, that was all.

At the Carrefour des Galeries Lafayette the man changed from the omnibus to the tramway of La Muette, Ganimard after him. They followed the Boulevard Haussmann, the Avenue Victor Hugo, and not until they reached the end of the line did Baudru descend. Then aimlessly he entered the Bois de Boulogne.

After an hour, he seemed thoroughly fatigued and finally, seeing a bench, seated himself. They were not far from Auteuil, and the spot at the side of a little pond hidden under the trees was absolutely deserted. A half hour passed, and Inspector Ganimard, impatient, decided to enter into conversation with him.

Ganimard approached the bench and took a seat beside Baudru. He lit a cigarette, made little circles in the sand with the end of his cane, and said: "Pretty cool, isn't it?"

A silence ensued. Then suddenly in the midst of this silence a burst of laughter resounded—a

jolly, happy laugh, not unlike the carefree laughter of a child who cannot help surrendering to mirth in a completely spontaneous way. Ganimard actually felt his hair rise on end. With a quick movement he seized the man by the edge of the coat and looked at him, examining him even more carefully than he had done at the trial. In truth it was no longer that man whom he saw! It was the man, if you will. But it was also the other, the genuine!

Aided now by his intense eagerness, Ganimard recognized the ardent sparkle of the eyes. He saw the identity in those meager cheeks, and the familiar, mocking mouth behind the grin that deformed it!

"Arsene Lupin! he stammered, and suddenly in violent anger, he gripped his old enemy by the shoulder and tried to hurl him to the ground. Despite his fifty years, he still possessed unusual vigor while Arsene Lupin seemed to be in poor condition.

The struggle was of short duration. Arsene Lupin scarcely defended himself, and almost as soon as he had made the attack, Ganimard let go. His right arm hung inert, benumbed!

"If you police ever learned jiu-jitsu," said Lupin, "you would know, my friend, that this stroke is called the *udishiv ghi* in Japanese."

Then he added coolly: "A moment more and I would have broken your arm, and it would have served you right. I voluntarily unveil my incognito and you take advantage of my confidence."

Ganimard was silent. This escape for which he considered himself responsible—for was it not he who, by his startling testimony, had called attention to the error of the court? This escape seemed to him the disgrace of his life. A tear trickled down toward his gray mustache.

"Mon Dieu, Ganimard, don't grieve about it! If you had not spoken in court, I should have arranged to have someone else do so. Come, you know I could not afford to have Desire Baudru condemned."

"Then it was indeed you who was there?" murmured Ganimard. "And it is you who are here?"

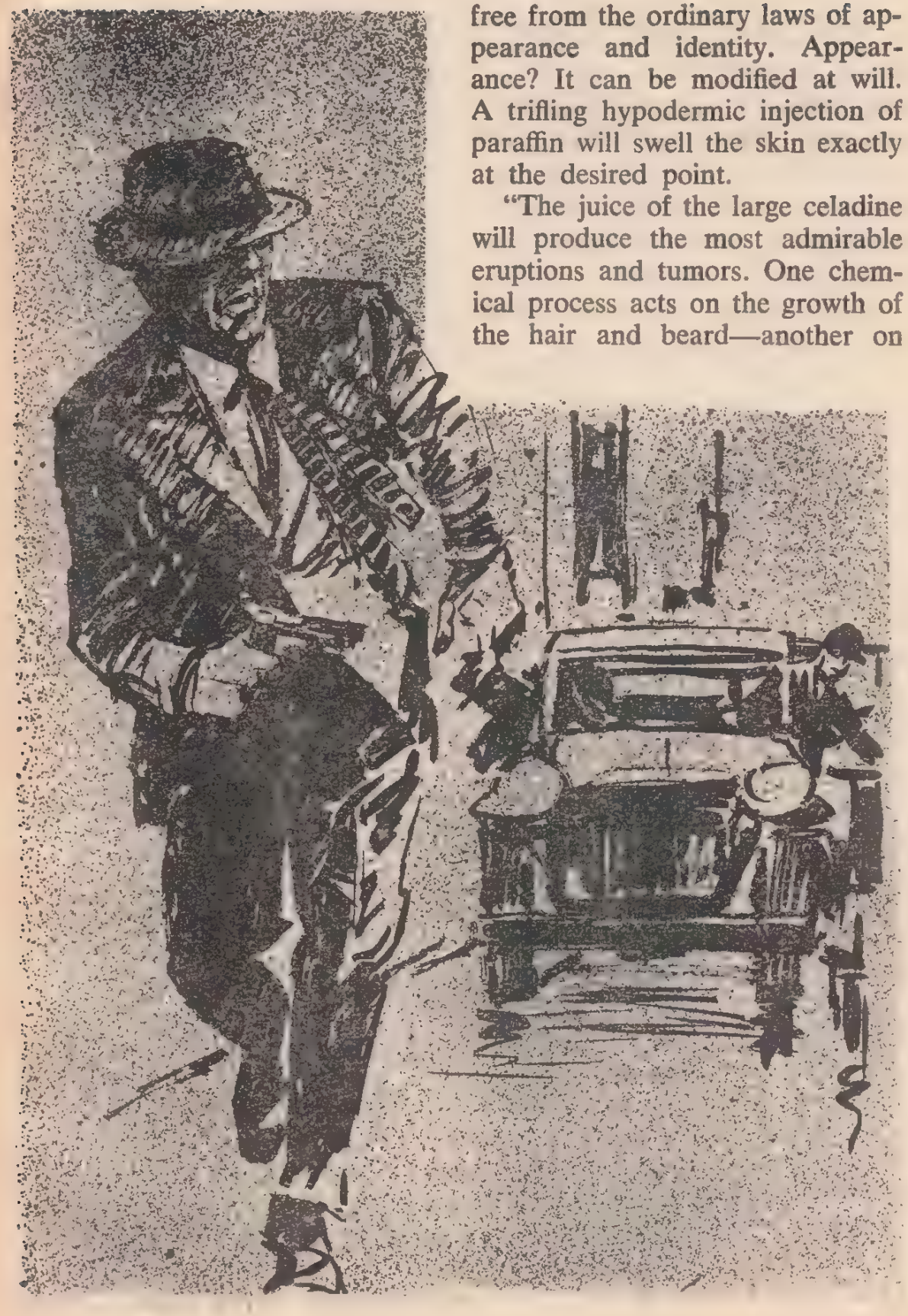
Lupin nodded. "Both at the trial and now—none other than myself."

"Is it possible?"

"One does not need to be a sorcerer. It is enough as Judge Bouvier remarked, to have spent a dozen years preparing for all eventualities."

"But your face, your eyes?"

"You know very well that I did not spend eighteen months with Doctor Altier at the Hospital Saint Louis merely to satisfy an idle curiosity. I thought that he who would have the honor of being called Arsene Lupin ought to be



free from the ordinary laws of appearance and identity. Appearance? It can be modified at will. A trifling hypodermic injection of paraffin will swell the skin exactly at the desired point.

"The juice of the large celadine will produce the most admirable eruptions and tumors. One chemical process acts on the growth of the hair and beard—another on

the sound of the voice. Add to that two months of diet in cell twenty-four, exercises repeated a thousand times, and continuous practice in stooping in harmony with this curvature. Finally, five drops of atrophine in my eyes to give them a haggard and evasive look and the trick is played."

"I cannot see how the guards failed to—"

"The metamorphosis was gradual. They did not observe the change day by day."

"But Desire Baudru?"

"Baudru exists. He is a harmless fellow whom I met last year, and really he shows some similarity to me in his features. Foreseeing a possible arrest, I had him cared for and applied myself to the task of lessening as much as possible the points of difference between us. My friends had him put in jail one night, so that he might get out at about the same time as I, and make the coincidence easy to establish.

"You will observe that it was necessary to have them find traces of him, without which the court would have wondered who I was. In thus presenting Baudru, it was inevitable that they would leap at him, and despite the insurmountable difficulties of a substitution, would prefer to accept that as an explanation rather than to declare their ignorance."

"Yes, yes, quite right," said Ganimard.

"And then," Lupin went on, "I held in my hand a formidable trump, a card delt me at the start —*everyone's expectation of my escape*. You will understand that to escape without escaping, it was necessary that people should believe in advance that I would escape. It had to be an article of faith, an absolute conviction, a truth as clear as sunlight! That was accomplished by my will power.

"Arsene Lupin would escape. Arsene Lupin would not attend the trial. Thus when you rose and said: "This man is not Arsene Lupin"—if a single person had doubted I would have been lost. If a single person had thought: "But what if he *were* Arsene Lupin?" If you had leaned over and looked at me as if you were not completely sure than all of my precautions would have been in vain! Yet I felt convinced that logically, psychologically, no one could entertain that idea."

Suddenly Arsene Lupin seized the hand of Ganimard and said: "Come Ganimard, confess that eight days after our interview in the Prison de la Sante you expected me at your home at four o'clock as I had requested."

"What about the prison wagon?" asked Ganimard without answering.

"Merely a bluff. It was my friends who rigged up and substituted that old unused wagon and

wished to try the game. But I realized that it was impracticable without the aid of exceptional chances, and I prefer certainties. Yet I thought it advantageous to make this attempted escape and give it the greatest publicity. Such a first escape, boldly executed, gave the strength of an escape realized in advance."

"What about the cigar?"

"Hollowed out by me."

"And the mysterious correspondent?"

"The woman and I are identical. I can write any hand at will."

Ganimard reflected a moment and then shook his head and asked: "How was it that when they applied the Bertillon system of measurements to Baudru the results were not identical with those of Arsene Lupin?"

"Even before my return from America one of the employees in the police department accepted an engagement to register a false figure at the beginning of my description for a certain sum. That is quite enough to throw out the whole system. The measurements of Baudru could not, therefore coincide with those of Arsene Lupin."

There was another silence and then Ganimard asked: "What are you going to do now?"

"Now," exclaimed Arsene Lupin. "I am going to rest, train to recover my condition, follow a strict diet and gradually become my old self. It is all very well to be Baudru or anyone else, to change one's personality as one might change his shirt, to pick out a new appearance, a new voice, a new expression, a new handwriting. But there might come a time when I could not recognize myself and that would be tragic indeed. Just now I feel like the man who lost his shadow. I am going to get acquainted with myself!"

Lupin walked up and down in the dim light. Then, halting before Ganimard, he said: "We have nothing more to say to each other, have we Ganimard?"

"Yes," replied the inspector. "I should like to know whether you will reveal the truth about your escape—the error that I made."

"Oh, no one will ever know that it was Arsene Lupin whom they released. It is too much to my advantage to accumulate about me the shadow of mystery. So fear not, my dear friend, and adieu. I am dining out this evening and have barely time to dress."

"I thought you were so eager to rest!"

"Alas, there are certain social obligations that one cannot escape! My rest will have to begin tomorrow."

"Where do you dine, then?"

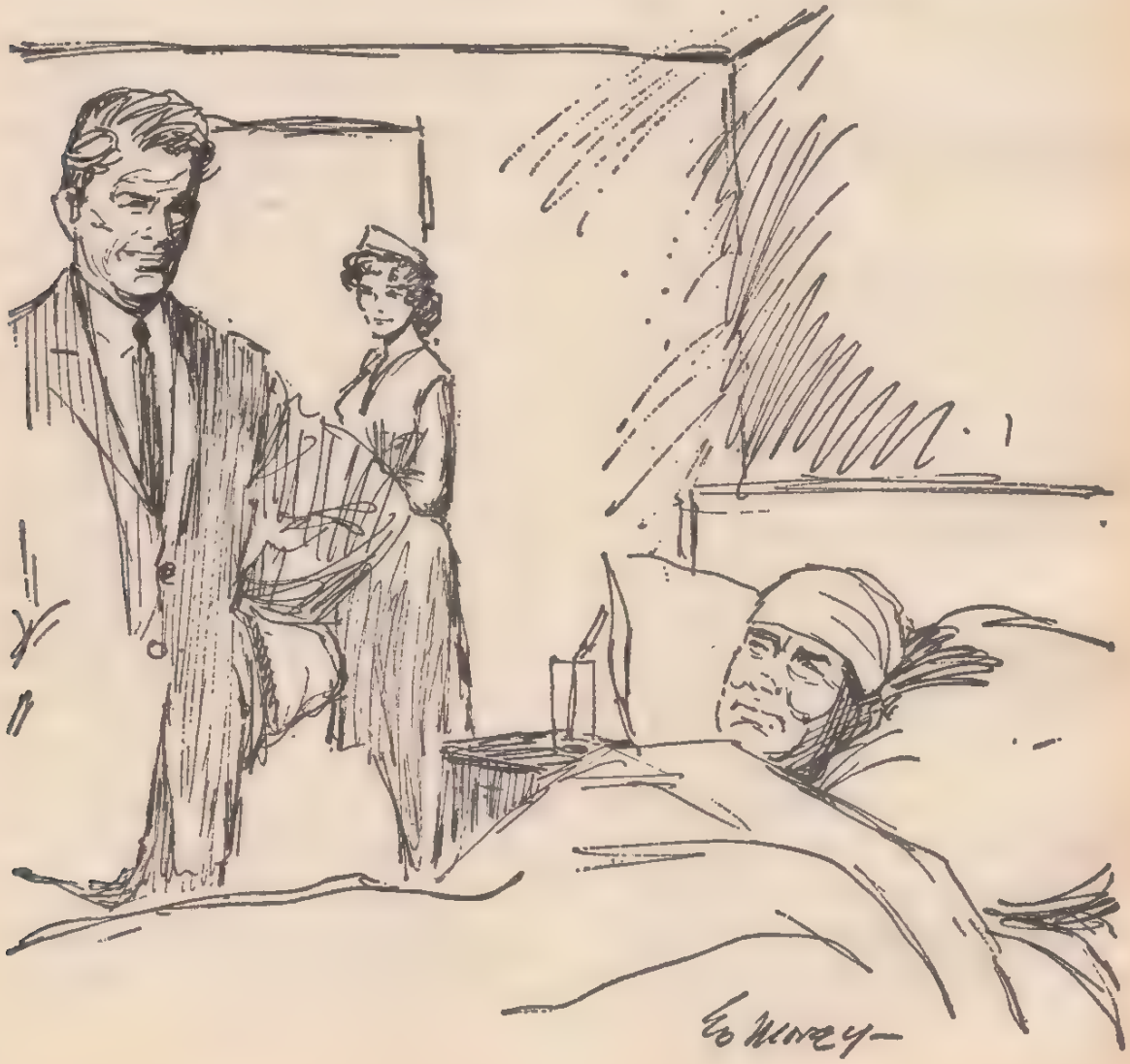
"At the American embassy."

THE SPOOK GOES WEST

Turn about may be fair play . . . as the proverb states. But it can make a determined police lieutenant angrier than a hornet.

by JAMES HOLDING

I GOT THE word from the police ambulance crew that took Spook to the hospital. Their report said they'd answered a call from Venner's Market and found Spook Caldwell, one of our best-known and least-liked ex-cons, lying cold-cocked in the alley behind the store, suffering from what looked like an acute case of blackjackitis. He had a lump on his head the size of a cue ball. Officer Barry had left him at the hospital where a little tender loving care



was expected to bring him back to consciousness eventually. At least, the intern thought it would.

I admit I felt a flush of pleasure when I heard that Spook had been sapped by somebody. It served the crumb-bum right, I thought, after all the trouble he had dished out to other people in the course of his muggings, burglaries, inept con games and bar-room brawls.

We had sent him away for one-to-four on three different occasions. But he always turned up after his stretch like a bad penny, and started to annoy us again in every way he could. At least it seemed that way to us. He was a real troublemaker, Spook was. So I was glad some patriotic citizen had given him a tap on the head, whatever the justification. And I fervently hoped Spook's concussion wouldn't be a trivial one.

It was, though. For I got word from the hospital right after lunch that Spook was conscious now and registering both physical and mental distress.

"Does he want to see the police?" I asked.

No, they told me. Old Spook just wanted his head to stop aching, so he could get out of there. He didn't want to see the police. Emphatically.

I put on my hat, anyway, and went across the street to the hospital. Not because I wanted to. But after all, I'm a cop and have certain obligations.

I walked into the ward where Spook was bedded down and pulled up an uncomfortable chair to his bedside. A nurse was fussing around a patient nearby. Spook's long skinny body was outlined under the covers. His unhealthy pink hair looked like a burlesque comic's wig and his cadaverous face—bags under his eyes were as big and black as sunglasses—turned toward me.

"Hi, Spook," I said to him! "I brought you an aspirin."

"You know what you can do with it," Spook said. Then, wearily, "Get lost, will you, copper?"

I said, "It seems I owe you the same protection I owe honest citizens, Spook, although you are nothing but a hoodlum. At least, that's what the book says." I was enjoying myself. "So who slugged you this morning? And for what?"

"I got no complaint to make," Spook growled. "I wouldn't ask you for help if I was dying in the street right in front of police headquarters. Get lost, I still say. Who wants you?"

"You were the victim of a vicious attack," I insisted gently, smiling at the bum. "It is my duty to apprehend the criminal. And I'm not about to let you talk me out of it. So give the details."

"It was a private affair."

"Huh-uh." I shook my head. "The commission of a crime is a *public* affair. Who slugged you?"

"How should I know?" said

Spook sullenly. "All I know is, I was knocked unconscious."

"Sapped?"

He shrugged. "The curtain came down awful sudden. And when I come to, here in this lousy hospital, all of my money was gone."

I began to enjoy myself even more. "Money? You had money? That's real sad. How much?"

Spook touched the bandages on his head with a grimace. "Fifty grand," he muttered.

I nearly swallowed my chewing gum. "What!" I yelled, louder than hospital protocol permits. "What did you say?"

The nurse gave me a nasty look.

"I said fifty grand." Spook was bitter. "You wanted to know and I told you." He shut his spooky-looking eyes for a moment and sighed clear down into his hollow chest. "Fifty thousand clams!" he said dreamily. "All in one tight little bundle. It was beautiful, Randall, beautiful. I never had so much—"

"Wait a minute," I said, interrupting him rudely. "You expect me to believe you were taken for all that dough this morning?"

"Believe what you want to," Spook said. "And drop dead, too —for all I care."

"Where did you ever get fifty grand, jerk?" I asked, laughing out loud at this pitiful lie, intended to impress me. "Did your fairy godmother leave it to you in her will?"

"My uncle," Spook said, "not my godmother."

I stared at him, suddenly sober. "Your uncle?" The funny part was, I almost believed him.

"My mother's sister's husband. Died eleven months ago in Minneapolis. Name of DeRoy. He left me fifty G's in his will. And I just got it this morning."

"What lawyers?"

"Dixon and Schrumm."

"In cash?"

"By certified check. I'd just been to the bank and cashed the check."

"What bank?"

"First National. And I was on my way home when—"

"When some cozy, back-ally ugly son put out your lights and lifted the whole bundle off you!" I finished for him delightedly. "Boy, that's rich. I could love that sap-artist like a brother." I stopped laughing and said, "But how do you know your dough's gone? You just woke up." I went to the closet at the foot of his bed. "Are these your clothes?"

"Yeah. And I already asked the nurse to check them for the cash.

It's gone. Fifty beautiful thousand-buck bills in a brown envelope." Spook looked at me with his sad cow's eyes while I went carefully through his clothes.

I found no sign of a brown envelope or of fifty G's in Spook's pockets. His other possessions seemed to be there—cigarettes, lighter, ballpoint pen, dirty handkerchief, coins, a few bucks in a spring clip. There was even a yesterday's copy of the *Wall Street Journal* in the pocket of the raincoat he had been wearing when blackjacked.

Spook said, "It wouldn't surprise me none if your lousy cops picked the dough off me in the ambulance, Randall. For their favorite charity—themselves."

I closed my eyes to enjoy in peace the thought that this little shoddy thief had had fifty thousand dollars stolen from *him*. If, that is, he wasn't lying about his legacy. And I didn't think he was. It was too easy to check to be phony. Spook's regular style was to hand us some story that took four or five days of hard work before we could prove it was a lie from the beginning. This was too simple to be one of Spook's lies.

I chuckled, said: "You shouldn't ever accuse the police of improper conduct, Spook. And you wouldn't, I know, unless you were in a bad temper from your poor aching head. But I forgive you. And what's more, I'll try to find this thief and get your money back for you. That's a promise."

"Don't do me no favors."

"Although," I went on, "it will be a pleasant change for me to hunt for a criminal and not really care whether I find him or not."

This gentle irony went over Spook's aching head. He's a slob.

I got up. "Who do you suspect?" I asked. "Anybody in particular?"

"I don't suspect nobody. I never cracked one word to anybody about coming into the dough, believe me. I knew about it but I kept it quiet on purpose."

"Why?"

"You know why. There's a hundred guys in this town would figure that a piece of my fifty grand belonged to them. At least a hundred. Bums who've lent me a fin or two and want their dough back. Schnooks that think I crossed them, one time or another. Heist-guys who'd like to score off me if I was that big. Guys who got it in for me because of a dame, maybe. Or I conned them out of a couple of beers. Or—hell, plenty of other reasons. They'd draw a beeline on my fifty grand if they knew I had it. That's why I clammed up about it."

"Except when you were plastered, maybe?"

"I don't get big mouth when I'm drunk, copper. You know that."

"I never got drunk with you, thank God, so I wouldn't know.

But somebody heard about your windfall, that's plain as the bump on your head. And they relieved you of the dough *muy pronto, amigo.*" I laughed at him. "Don't think I don't sympathize, Spook. I do. But even you will admit you had this coming."

"Nurse!" Spook hollered. "Get this creep out of here! He's annoying me and slowing up my recovery!" Pretty big words for Spook. But I had all I needed. I tipped a hand at him and went out.

This was one of those rare times, I thought, when police work could be fun.

I went first to the lawyers, Dixon and Schrumm.

"Is it true," I said, after identifying myself, "that a local hood named Spook Caldwell inherited fifty thousand dollars from an uncle in Minneapolis? And that you made the distribution to him this morning?"

Old Mr. Dixon nodded pontifically. "Caldwell," he said. "Yes. Not 'Spook', however, Lieutenant. 'Cameron', I believe."

He rang for a copy of Spook's uncle's will. When it came, he said, "This is the provision you refer to, no doubt," and read me an item off the third page. "To my wife's nephew, Mr. Cameron Caldwell of Lake City, in the full knowledge that he is probably an incorrigible thief but with the hope, for my dear wife's sake, that this small legacy will permit him to learn the sweet taste of honesty before it is too late, I bequeath the sum of fifty thousand dollars.'"

When he stopped reading, I nodded and said, "That's it. Caldwell was slugged in broad daylight this morning behind a fruit market, and the entire fifty thousand you gave him was stolen."

"Goodness!" said Mr. Dixon. "I'm sorry about Mr. Caldwell. But don't worry about the money. We'll stop payment on the check."

"Too late. He cashed it as soon as he left here, I think. Cash is the only form of money these small-time crooks understand. May I use your phone?"

"Help yourself."

I called the First National Bank. They confirmed that Spook had cashed the check at ten-oh-five this morning. "Can you tell me the denominations of the bills you gave Mr. Caldwell?" I asked.

The teller who'd handled the transaction told me he'd given Spook fifty thousand-dollar bills in a brown manila envelope, just as Spook had reported.

I hung up. "Cash," I told Mr. Dixon. "And it's gone."

"Nothing we can do about it, then," Mr. Dixon said reasonably. "I'm sorry." He was obviously anxious for me to leave before I gave his outfit a bad name. So I left.

I went straight back to head-

quarters to talk to the two ambulance men who had brought Spook in. On my way to my office, I had to pass the headquarters press room. I stopped in the doorway. The men from the *Examiner* and the *Gazette* were sitting there at the center table, playing gin.

" I don't know whether you can use this," I said to them, deadpan, "but I think it's a story with an angle you'll like. And up to now, it's been kept under wraps."

I proceeded to tell them about Spook, the three-time-convicted thief, who was left fifty G's by a soft-headed uncle, then had it all lifted from him ten minutes after putting the cash in his pocket. When I finished, the press boys had forgotten all about their gin game.

"I think the angle that will really kill your customers," I suggested, "is the irony of the thing. In my long association with the police department, this is the one and only time I've ever run into a genuine, grade-A case of old-fashioned poetic justice. And you can quote me, if you like."

As I left them, I thought to myself, the publicity won't hurt me a bit, personally, and by stirring up talk and speculation in the bars, poolrooms and bordellos, it just might shake out a grain or two of information somewhere that would help me catch Spook's thief.

Officer Barry, of the ambulance crew, confirmed that Spook was really unconscious and not shamming when they picked him up behind Venner's Market. So I went out to the market and talked to Mr. Venner, who had called in the report of a guy lying in the alley behind his store. We went out into the alley and looked over the scene of the crime.

There wasn't much to see. Spook had been lying on his face beside the cinderblock back wall of Venner's store, Venner told me —in the mouth of the alley, just seven or eight feet in from Sixth Street, which cut across the end of the alley at right angles. Easiest thing in the world for someone to loiter concealed in the alley mouth until Spook came along Sixth on his way home from the bank, reach out and tap him on the noggin as he passed, then drag him back into the alley a few feet. Here the head-knocker could take the brown envelope of money un-

observed and afterward, stroll casually away.

I shrugged. It was no different from a hundred other muggings, except that instead of a few paltry bucks, this joker had got away with fifty grand.

Well, I put all the wheels in motion, the same as if Spook Caldwell had been a church vestryman or something like that instead of a cheap crook. I set men to convassing the neighborhood, trying to turn up any witness who had seen somebody in or leaving the alley mouth at quarter after ten that morning. I had checks run on the customers—only three—who had been in Venner's Market when Venner, going out back to break open a new case of lettuce, had discovered Spook lying there.

I also started the sorry business of calling in our stoolies, trying to get a line on whom Spook may have talked to when drunk and whether anyone had heard a rumor of his inheritance. And I assigned a man to interview the staff at Dixon and Schrumm's, hoping to locate somebody there who might have innocently leaked the news of Spook's good fortune to somebody else.

Then I went back to the hospital to see Spook again, picking up the evening newspapers on the way.

Both papers had Spook's fifty thousand dollar robbery in banner heads. Fifty thousand is a lot of dough, and it just happened that Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, India, China, Cambodia and the rest were temporarily quiet that day. So Spook got a big play.

Ex-convict Inherits Fortune. Hold-up Man Seizes Fifty G's and Flees. Poetic Justice, Police Lieutenant Claims. Mysterious Assailant Being Sought. Spook Caldwell Treated to Own Medicine. Ex-convict Goes Through Inherited Fortune in Ten Minutes. That was the kind of stuff they'd come up with. The newscast on my car radio blared the same kind of thing.

I laughed myself into the hospital, relishing Spook's anger and bitterness beforehand. You may say that it wasn't quite fair of me to have used Spook's past record and current bad luck as a springboard to launch a gag news story. But honest to Joe, I couldn't help it. That jerk had always bugged me something fierce.

When I went into his ward, carrying the newspapers, he was making a big production of pretending to read the yesterday's edition of *The Wall Street Journal* I'd found that morning in his raincoat pocket. He was feeling better, judging from his looks, but no amount of bed rest was ever going to improve those sickening looks of his very much.

I playfully slapped aside his *Wall Street Journal* and tossed the *Examiner* and the *Dispatch* on his bed. "Here, Spook," I said, "Take a gander at these. What do you

want to read that rich man's rag for, anyway? Especially now?"

"I figure to get some advice from it on where to stick my money when you get it back," Spook said nastily. "Am I wasting my time?"

"Not at all," I said. I grinned at him. "We're giving your heist the full treatment." I told him what I'd done. "If anybody can get your bread back, Spook, we can. You know that."

He didn't believe me.

"So read the papers I've brought you," I said. "You're all over page one."

"I already heard some of this crap on the radio." He rapidly scanned the papers. Then he said sourly, "Thanks, copper, thanks a lot. You always like to kick them when they're down, don't you?" But for some reason, he didn't seem to be as sore as I expected.

"When are they letting you out of here?" I asked him.

"Tomorrow."

"I'll keep in touch, Spook. To report progress." I enjoyed his scowl. It made his stupid face seem sillier than ever.

"Forget it," he said. "I didn't want you in the first place, and I ain't changed my mind now."

"But your money?" I objected, leering at him. "Who'll get back your money?"

He told me what I could do with the money.

I hit the sack about eleven that night—early for me—but I couldn't seem to get to sleep. I kept thinking about Spook and his fifty grand in a brown envelope—how he hadn't seemed as bitterly burned up as he should have been at the public fool the newspapers and broadcasters were making of him. The stupid slob, I thought to myself with disgust, lying there big as life in that hospital bed, reading *The Wall Street Journal* just like a real operator.

And that's the exact minute when a horrible suspicion hit me. It was like being bumped by a bomb.

The next morning I made three quick calls: to the big newsdealer's on the corner of Fifth and Main; to the First National Bank; and to the alley behind Venner's Market.

At ten o'clock I called the hospital. They told me Spook had been released at nine. I got into my car and highballed out to the sleazy old building on South Seventeenth where Spook had a crummy pad on the third floor.

I pounded on his door, then walked right in without waiting for him to answer. When I charged in, he was leaning over an open drawer of the three-legged dresser in a corner of his bedroom, fishing out a clean shirt. He turned around like a guy who had never heard of being careful after a concussion.

"Who let you in?" he asked in a mean voice. "Get the hell out of

my room, unless you got a warrant."

I paid no attention. "Listen Spook. I want you, buddy."

"For what? To give me back my money?"

"For trying to mislead the police with false information." I gulped on an instinct to curse him. "False evidence."

"False evidence, for God's sake? That's a laugh. What's the false evidence jazz?"

"You told me you were sapped and robbed of fifty grand."

"That ain't what I said. But anyway, what of it?"

"This is what of it." I held out the copy of *The Wall Street Journal,* two days old, that I'd got from the newsdealer an hour ago. It was folded over so an advertisement on page eight leaped to the eye: CASH CAN PRODUCE HIGH EARNINGS, the ad said, WHILE INSURED UP TO FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS!

"This was the page you were looking at last night when I came into the hospital," I said to Spook. "Isn't it? I remember the fifty grand part of that headline. And I'll bet it's what caught you, too. Just the amount of your loss."

"Ain't I allowed to read The Wall Street Journal?" he complained, glaring at me.

"This ad says to send cash up to fifty grand to open an insured savings account with the Financial Association of Southern California, and you'll get six and a half percent interest on the dough."

"That's generous," Spook said. "But why tell me?"

"Because that's where your fifty grand went yesterday! It wasn't lifted off you, as you claimed. You sent it by registered mail to this damn financial association to open a savings account!"

Spook's long lips lifted a little. "What is it with you, Randall? You cracking up? When a cop goes off his rocker—"

I let him have the clincher. "I just came from the branch post office in the rotunda of the First National Bank building. You mailed a registered letter there at ten-oh-eight yesterday morning. Three minutes after you cashed your check. The letter was about half an inch thick. The envelope was brown manila. And it went to this Southern California address." I tapped the *Wall Street Journal* ad.

"What makes you so sure it was me?"

"The clerk remembered the envelope. He remembered your crazy face. And his records say it was you."

"You forced your way into this," Spook said. "I didn't want you in it, remember."

I went right on. "I also happened to take a close look just now at the cinderblock wall behind Venner's Market where you were picked up empty. And you know what I found?"

"Please tell me, Lieutenant. I can hardly wait."

I wanted to cave in the crummy little jerk's pointed chin. "I found three of your dirty pink hairs caught in a crack of the wall, four feet off the ground. You knocked yourself out, Spook. You rammed that wall with your head, deliberately. Isn't that so?"

"What if it is?" Spook said. "It's my head. And it was my money."

"You figured to make it look like a heist."

"Why not?"

"What *I* want to know is why."

"I told you," Spook said, pretending innocence no longer. "I told you there's a hundred guys in town—some of them my own pals—would take dead aim at my fifty G's if I had it. It wouldn't be safe for a single day from them crooks. And I wouldn't be safe, either. So if my fifty grand is taken off me by a heist guy, I ain't rich any more, right?"

"I ain't everybody's mark any more, right? Because the guys read in the papers that I lost the dough in a legitimate holdup. The sharpies lose interest in me. They begin looking for a smell of the fifty G's some place else. So I start a savings account and my dough is safe as in a bank. It *is* in a bank. And I live high on my regular income. That's all it is."

I saw it. Oh sure. The ambitious young con-man with a face like a chimpanzee who even cons the cops. Me. For as sure as I'll never make Captain now, Spook had used my known dislike for him to con him into spreading the word through the press that his fifty grand had been stolen. To get all his fellow crooks off his back. To protect his new wealth from the inevitable depredations of his own kind.

Well, maybe he'd conned me. But I wasn't about to stay conned. Now that I was with it, I'd tell *this* story to the newsboys, too. And we'd see how long Spook's friends stayed out of his hair.

I told him so. "What good would that do?" he asked. "The dough is safe. Nobody can get at it but me. I'm going to live on my income, copper. In another town. How about that?"

"You've still got to answer to a few faked evidence charges, Junior."

"Faked evidence?" Spook was hurt. "Tell me if I'm wrong, but ain't there got to be a crime before there can be any evidence at all?"

"Oh, there's a crime, all right. Deliberate misrepresentation of facts to the police. Withholding evidence. False witness. Swindling. Use of public servants, the police, for private ends. Don't worry. I'll think of something."

"Wait a minute." Spook spoke bitterly. "If I happen to stumble into a wall and bump my head, is that police business? Who asked you into this thing? Not me. Who

reported that I'd been sapped? Not me. Who told you my fifty grand was lifted off me? Not me. You jumped to all them conclusions by yourself!"

I looked at him in astonishment.

"I never told you I was sapped," Spook said. "I said I was knocked unconscious, which I was. I didn't say how or by who. All I told you about my money was the God's truth—that when I come to in the hospital, my money was *gone.* I didn't say it had been stolen. *You* said it was stolen. Remember?"

"No!" I yelled. "I don't remember! You told me you were sapped and robbed and that's what I'll swear to!"

"I wouldn't go too far with that, if I was you," Spook said, "because that nurse in the ward has our conversation written down word for word."

"What!"

"Yeah. She took it down when you came to see me in the hospital, the first time. I told her beforehand that I *knew* you'd come and pester me, even when I asked the police to stay out. I told her you hated my guts for no good reason and you'd stick words in my mouth I never said at all. And I asked her if she'd stick close while you was there and keep count of what we actually said. She was a impartial witness, if you tried to fit me with a frame."

Spook's big black eye bags stared mournfully at me. They didn't help the acid taste in my mouth a bit. I said, "You know damned well you wanted me to come in on this—to do just what I've done. You were counting on my giving the story to the press. You planned it that way. To get yourself and your fifty grand off the hook with police cooperation."

"You said it, Lieutenant. I didn't."

"Well, don't think for a minute you can get away with using the police to drag your own rotten chestnuts out of the fire."

"No?"

"No. I'll retract the whole thing in the papers. I'll tell them you conned me. That I was too anxious to do my duty as a law enforcement officer to suspect you of this lousy swindle."

"You'll play hell doing that. You'll sure have a great future when you publicly admit you let a minor-league crook like me make a monkey out of you." Spook laughed. "That I'd like to see. The great Lieutenant Randall held up to public scorn as the dumbest sucker of all time!"

I started for him, ready to tear him apart piece by piece.

"Take it easy," he said, backing off nervously. "Hold it. It won't do you no good to use police brutality on me, neither. That'll just make it worse for you."

"It couldn't be worse," I said, but I held off. I knew the jerk was right. And I knew I could never

stand the big ribbing I'd get if I exposed him. I said, "Did you say you were moving to another town?"

"Yeah. Somewhere farther west. Closer to my dough, see?"

"Then do yourself a big favor, punk. Move right away. Because if you stay here in my town, I promise you that no matter how long it takes or how I have to do it, I'll get you for this, and get you good."

Spook nodded quite calmly. "I was just starting to pack when you come along," he said. Now that he'd won the marbles, he couldn't help rubbing it in. "Listen," he urged me, "look at the thing from *my* angle once, why don't you? I ain't always been a model citizen, I guess. But this time, you got to admit, I got justice on my side."

"Justice!" I yelled. I was so mad that I threw him, without thinking, the straight line he'd been waiting for: "What kind of justice do you call a crazy crooked mess like this?"

Spook snickered. "Why, Lieutenant," he said, "I thought you knew. Poetic justice. What else?"

NEXT MONTH **A BRILLIANT SHORT STORY**

TELETYPE

by Will F. Jenkins

The teletype was never silent. Night and day it clicked out a chill warning: "Stay alert. This man is dangerous!"

ONE HOUR FOR CRIME

by

CARROLL MAYERS

It was a daring crime and its success depended on careful timing. So many things could go wrong.

LUTHER ACKLEY was on his lunch hour but he was not eating lunch. At seven minutes past twelve he was in his room around the corner from the Fidelity Finance and Loan Company, hurriedly dumping from a briefcase a sizable amount of his employer's capital.

Luther's thin fingers trembled as he riffled through the neatly-bound money packets. He hated to waste even seconds in estimating the total, because in less than sixty minutes his failure to return from lunch would be noted, with every subsequent moment pregnant with the likelihood of his theft being discovered.

Still, he felt he had to have some figure to cite to Marsha when he phoned her, told her he was coming, and warned her to be ready.

Forty-seven thousand! Luther's chest constricted, his head spinning a bit as he added the notations he'd jotted on a scratch pad. He could just see Marsha's deep green eyes dancing, her soft red lips no longer pouting over his apparent obtuseness in regard to her thinly veiled hints. Marsha certainly would be pleased!

A short knock at the door shattered Luther's reverie. He started, dropping his pencil. It was highly improbable that any of the other roomers had come visiting, for

they all worked offices from nine to five. Most likely his caller was Mrs. Ledden, his landlady.

Luther bit his lip, his weak eyes apprehensive behind the thick-lensed glasses that had slipped a little below the bridge of his nose. Momentarily, he considered ignoring the knock, but abandoned the idea. Mrs. Ledden coming to his room this time of day could only mean that she had seen him return. Failure to answer her knock would be certain to seem odd.

He had spread the money packets and scratch pad on the bed. Drawing a deep breath, Luther retrieved his pencil, swept both the money and the pad beneath the pillow, and straightened the bedspread. After a final glance to be certain no tell-tale edges showed beneath the pillowcase he smoothed his thinning hair, and went to the door.

"Oh—Mrs. Ledden," he said. "Please come in."

Letitia Ledden was an angular, plain-visaged woman whose compressed lips and gimlet gaze were mute testimony to the thoroughness and perspicacity with which she ran her business. As Luther acknowledged her presence, she manufactured what appeared to be a smile of sympathetic inquiry.

"You're not ill, Mr. Ackley?"

"Ill?"

"Yes," Mrs. Ledden said. "When I saw you return this time of day, I thought perhaps you weren't feeling well."

Luther shook his head, managing a slight smile of his own. "Not at all, Mrs. Ledden," he told her. "I've simply come for some papers I forgot this morning."

"Oh—I'm glad that's all it is." Mrs. Ledden's inflection suggested Luther's health did not truly concern her, and that there was a stronger motivation behind her unscheduled visit. Her next remark, delivered in an artfully offhand vein as she turned to leave, betrayed a more personal intent.

"While I'm here, Mr. Ackley may—"

Luther stole a glance at his watch. 12:14. *Why didn't the old biddy go?*

"Yes?" he asked, knowing quite well what she was about to say.

"About your rent," Mrs. Ledden told him. "You're now three weeks behind, you know."

Had it not been for the urgency whipping through him, Luther would have laughed aloud. Forty-seven thousand dollars within six feet of her, and the woman was worried over three weeks' rent! As it was, he brought his smile back, although it had a strained quality.

"Yes, I do know, Mrs. Ledden," Luther said stiffly. "As I've told you, I'm sorry I haven't found it possible to keep up to date, but I fully expect to give you complete payment very shortly."

"I hope so." Mrs. Ledden was

not phased by his tone. "You know my policy of insisting that all guests meet their obligation on time. I don't wish to regret my exception in your case, Mr. Ackley."

"I assure you, you won't."

"Very well." Her piece spoken, Mrs. Ledden favored him with a final sharp look, and retreated down the hall.

Luther hastily shut the door, and checked his watch for the third time. The exchange had cost him another minute. He pulled a suitcase from beneath the bed, and packed all the money packets but one, which he pocketed. He then threw in the few items of clothing and toilet articles he considered essential until he could acquire a replacement wardrobe in keeping with his new financial status.

As he worked, Luther once more envisaged Marsha's rapturous response when he called her. Marsha, the delectable 38-24-36 bundle of charms and wiles responsible for his being in default with Mrs. Ledden. Luther made a moderate salary, quite satisfactory for the simple needs of a thirty-eight-year-old bachelor. But it was totally inadequate to cope with a jade pendant, a diamond brooch, a mink stole. Salary and modest savings combined could hardly continue to supply such luxuries.

Marsha Bristol was a part-time model and Luther had first met her three months ago, when a sudden shower had made him duck into an intimate little bistro just off the Avenue. Marsha, attractive, green-eyed, blonde, had been sipping a frozen daiquiri while she waited for the rain to stop.

Luther seldom drank liquor, but he'd ordered a bottle of beer and the two of them had fallen into idle conversation. He had been carrying a copy of MANSIONS OF PHILOSOPHY, and Marsha had appeared fascinated by his interest and comprehension. Her fascination might have come after Luther had casually mentioned his place of employment, but he refused to allow himself to become too definite about that.

What was definite was Luther's embarking on a roseate flight of fancy, luxuriating in three months' blissful anticipation sparked by Marsha's obvious interest and fueled by his expensive gifts.

The only cloud on Luther's azure horizon was Marsha's continued inquisitiveness about his work, and her subtle inferences. Luther doggedly refused to recognize all such intimations. With a pretense of incomprehension he kept thrusting them to the back of his mind.

The last instance had been three nights ago. They were revisiting the intimate little bistro, and Marsha seemed entranced by a well-known female vocalist whose performance was superb.

"A girl like that must lead a wonderful life," she suggested at one point.

"Oh?" Luther regarded her anxiously, in little doubt as to what had prompted the remark. "What do you mean by 'wonderful', honey?"

"Traveling, seeing new places all the time, able to afford whatever she desires—" Marsha's words trailed off dreamily.

He hazarded a tenuous rebuttal. "Money isn't everything, honey."

Marsha's green eyes went wide. "Of course it isn't, Luther," she told him." It's just that it can provide a girl with so many nice things." She patted his hand. "Like all those lovely presents you keep giving me."

Luther sighed, his gaze almost miserable as he looked at the gorgeous creature opposite him. "Marsha—about those presents—"

She cut him off with a sweet smile. "I understand, darling. They *were* expensive and I certainly don't expect a man in your circumstances to keep buying me such extravagant things." The hand pat changed to a warm squeeze. "That's what's so unfair, Luther. You work with all that money—thousands and thousands—and that greedy finance company won't even pay you a respectable slary."

"But it *is* respectable, Marsha. It's only that—"

She interrupted him again, her smile still holding. "Let's not spoil our last evening by quarreling."

His world rocked. "Our last evening?"

Marsha's throaty laugh was comforting. "I shouldn't have said that. But I may have to leave town for awhile. Now—let's listen to the orchestra, shall we?"

Luther had listened, but he hadn't heard the music. Instead, a small, persistent voice which for weeks had been muttering suggestive urgings in some remote crevice of his mind abruptly swelled to a crescendo of command, and in that pulsating instant Luther had known what he must do. Today he had done it.

Having finished packing, Luther again checked the time. 12:21. Leaving the suitcase on the bed, he went to the pay phone in the hall. A look up and down the hall and over the bannister told him that Mrs. Ledden was nowhere in the vicinity, and all the other tenants' doors were closed.

He dredged up a dime, hastily dialed Marsha's number, breathing a fervent: *Please be home!*

She was. Her voice sounded heavy, blurred. "Hullo?" She said.

Luther pitched his own voice low. "It's me, Marsha. Luther."

"Who?"

"Luther."

"Luther!" Her voice became sharper and more distinct. "What do you mean, calling at this hour? You know I sleep until noon."

"I'm sorry, honey." He was perspiring now. The minutes were ticking away and he had to make her understand quickly. "I've done it, Marsha," he told her. "I've just taken forty-seven thousand dollars from the company."

A sharp intake of breath followed his statement. "Luther—have you been drinking?"

"No. No. I really have the money, Marsha. It will buy you everything you've ever wanted. I'm all packed, ready to leave." Perspiration had broken out on his forehead. "Get dressed—I'll be there in ten minutes. We can drive to the airport, and catch the first plane anywhere."

For a long moment the line hummed. Then Marsha queried quietly, "This isn't a joke, Luther?"

"It's not! I have the money! Please believe me and get ready."

"All right." Her tone turned satisfied, succinct. "I'll be dressed in ten minutes." She hung up.

Back in his room, Luther picked up his suitcase, and paused. What with her distrust and harping, he felt half justified in sticking Mrs. Ledden for the rent. But the woman had only been protecting her interest, just as he had this day insured his.

Luther took another ten seconds to pull three bills from the packet he had pocketed, and toss them on the dresser. Then he fled the room, hastening down the hall and rear stairs to his second-hand sedan, which was parked behind the rooming house.

Officer McCrory was on traffic duty at the corner as Luther drove up. There was a minor snarl and momentarily Luther feared more precious moments might be lost. But he had a speaking acquaintance with the officer and McCrory waved him through with a broad grin. Luther managed a wave of acknowledgment, speculating briefly as to what the officer's reaction would have been had he known he was expediting the departure of a thief.

It was 12:37 when Luther reached Marsha's building. Taking no chances on leaving the suitcase even in a locked car, he carried it with him as he rode the automatic elevator to Marsha's apartment.

Marsha admitted him promptly. She was wearing a chic blue traveling suit, and it was evident that she had dressed as rapidly as she had promised him she would. It was also evident that she had found a few spare seconds to do some phoning of her own. Lounging carelessly on the sofa in the living room was a man Luther never had seen before. A muscular character, young, with dark good looks and a pair of shrewd, calculating eyes.

"Come in, Luther." Making a casual gesture of entry, Marsha closed the door behind him.

Luther advanced slowly to the

center of the room. After giving Marsha one questioning glance, he directed his full attention to the apartment's third occupant. A tiny tocsin of alarm echoed in his subconscious. "Who are you?" he demanded.

The muscled individual languidly got to his feet. "The name's Jordan," he grinned. "Danny Jordan." His grin widened as he nodded at the suitcase. "You're toting the take with you, friend?" he asked.

The alarm was stronger now; the man knew about the money. Luther swung toward Marsha, his scalp prickling. "Marsha, what is this—?"

He stopped, abruptly stricken by the expression on the girl's face, a look she'd never worn before. It was coldly indifferent, and more than a shade contemptuous.

Luther's heart lurched as total comprehension engulfed him. Marsha's sole concern with him had been the money. She had subtly prodded him into turning thief, but had never intended running away with him. Her true interest was the good-looking character, the man she'd had on tap all along, and whom she had probably called the instant she'd hung up.

"No!" Luther blurted. Clutching the suitcase in both hands, he began to sidle toward the door. "You can't do this to me, Marsha."

She blocked his way. "Don't be a fool, Luther," she said. "Danny doesn't want to hurt you. We'll even let you keep a couple of thousand. You can skip town yourself."

"No. *No.*"

"You heard the lady." Danny's grin changed to a chuckle of anticipation as he flexed his fingers significantly. "Hand it over."

"No!" Whirling, Luther shoved Marsha aside, and started fumbling with the doorknob.

Danny's sardonic amusement faded. He swore softly, lunged, and grabbed Luther's shoulder. Luther wrenched free. But while tugging at the knob he'd been forced to abandon his dual grip on the suitcase and now the arm carrying the case flailed wildly, causing Danny to slip and go down on one knee. The suitcase looped in a short arc, one reinforced corner catching Danny squarely on the temple.

Danny Jordan collapsed, out cold.

The blow was sheer luck, almost unbelievable. Luther steadied himself, sucking in air. His gaze flicked from Danny's inert form to Marsha, and hardened.

The girl fell back, her bosom lifting, and her green eyes abruptly fearful. "You may have killed him," she breathed. "W-what are you going to do, Luther?"

Luther looked at his watch. 12:46. He knew exactly what he was going to do. He'd been an utter fool—but there still was time to return the money. He could sneak

it back in his briefcase—the same way he'd taken it. As though he were returning from lunch. No one would ever know. And Marsha and Danny couldn't talk, because of their own involvement.

There was contempt in Luther's own gaze as he gave the cringing girl a final glace. "Good-bye, Marsha," he told her flatly. Then he stepped over Danny's sprawled form, and left the apartment.

For the end of the lunch hour, traffic was unusually light. Luther made his rooming house, hastened up the rear stairs and was back in his room in just ten minutes.

Tossing the suitcase on the bed, he retrieved his briefcase, took up the three bills he'd left on the dresser for Mrs. Ledden and added them to the spare money packet he'd retained. He unsnapped the suitcase, fumbled beneath the clothing items for the rest of the money—and stiffened into shocked immobility as Mrs. Ledden and Traffic Officer McCrory suddenly entered the room.

"See, what did I tell you?" the landlady demanded of the policeman she'd patently summoned from his corner post in desperation. "He's packing more of his things. Skipping out, owing me three weeks' rent."

Mrs. Ledden's words were an outraged lament. "He didn't think I saw him the first time, skulking down the back stairs. I couldn't stop him then, but when he had the colossal nerve to sneak back for some more—"

Luther's mind was screaming. "Y-you don't understand, Mrs. Ledden," he stammered. "Your money's right there—" He motioned toward the dresser, then broke off numbly as he recalled he'd picked up the bills.

Officer McCrory's ruddy features were contorted in puzzlement. "I don't know, Mrs. Ledden," he said uncertainly. "Looks like Mr. Ackley's *un*packing."

And then the officer also stopped short as he spotted the money packets Luther had exposed. He took a quick step forward, his gaze narrowing." Maybe there *is* something, at that," he muttered. He stabbed Luther with a sharp look. "How about it?"

Luther's under lip quivered. He stared blankly at Officer McCrory. Then he slumped on the bed, and buried his face in his hands.

It was exactly one o'clock.

The ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

(Continued from Other Side)

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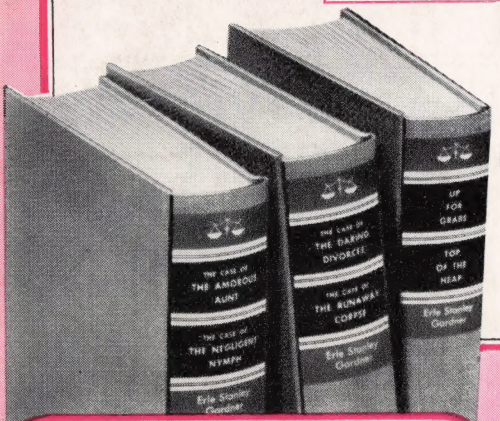

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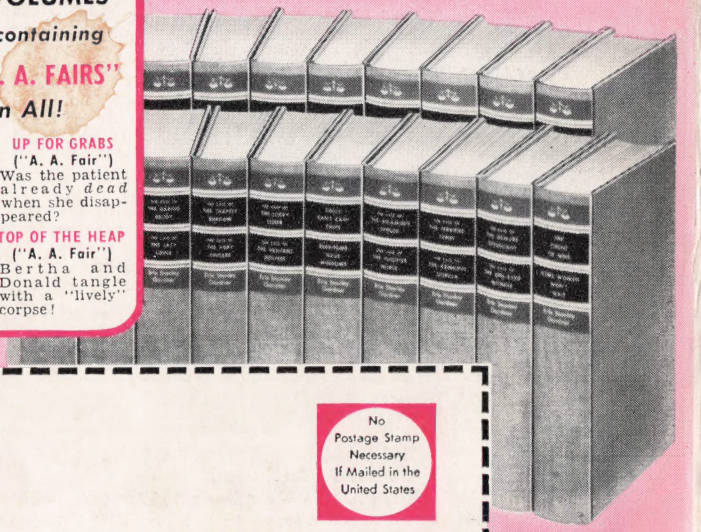

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